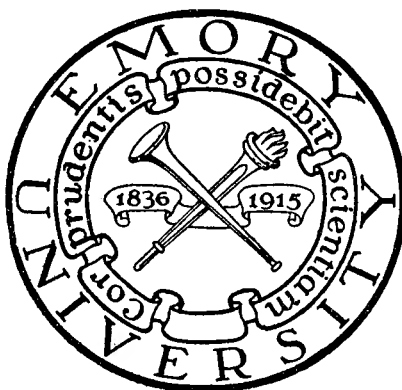


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THE LEGACY OF CAIN

BY
WILKIE COLLINS



IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. II.

London
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1889

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THE LEGACY OF CAIN.

Second Period (continued).

THE GIRLS AND THE JOURNALS.

CHAPTER XXV.

HELENA'S DIARY.

THEY all notice at home that I am looking worn and haggard. That hideous old maid, Miss Jillgall, had her malicious welcome ready for me when we met at breakfast this morning : ' Dear Helena, what has become of your beauty ? One would think you had left it in your room ! ' Poor deluded Eunice showed her sisterly sympathy : ' Don't joke about it, Selina : can't you see that Helena is ill ? '

I have been ill ; ill of my own wickedness.

But the recovery of my tranquillity will bring with it the recovery of my good looks. My fatal passion for Philip promises to be

the utter destruction of everything that is good in me. Well ! what is good in me may not be worth keeping. There is a fate in these things. If I am destined to rob Eunice of the one dear object of her love and hope—how can I resist ? The one kind thing I can do is to keep her in ignorance of what is coming, by acts of affectionate deceit.

Besides, if she suffers, I suffer too. In the length and breadth of England, I doubt if there is a much more wicked young woman to be found than myself. Is it nothing to feel that, and to endure it as I do ?

Upon my word, there is no excuse for me !

Is this sheer impudence ? No ; it is the bent of my nature. I have a tendency to self-examination, accompanied by one merit—I don't spare myself.

There are excuses for Eunice. She lives in a fools' paradise ; and she sees in her lover a radiant creature, shining in the halo thrown

over him by her own self-delusion. Nothing of this sort is to be said for me. I see Philip as he is. My penetration looks into the lowest depths of his character—when I am not in his company. There seems to be a foundation of good, somewhere in his nature. He despises and hates himself (he has confessed it to me), when Eunice is with him—still believing in her false sweetheart. But how long do these better influences last? I have only to show myself, in my sister's absence, and Philip is mine body and soul. His vanity and his weakness take possession of him the moment he sees my face. He is one of those men—even in my little experience I have met with them—who are born to be led by women. If Eunice had possessed my strength of character, he would have been true to her for life.

Ought I not, in justice to myself, to have lifted my heart high above the reach of such a creature as this? Certainly I ought! I

know it, I feel it. And yet, there is some fascination in loving him which I am absolutely unable to resist.

What, I ask myself, has fed the new flame which is burning in me? Did it begin with gratified pride? I might well feel proud when I found myself admired by a man of his beauty, set off by such manners and such accomplishments as his. Or, has the growth of this masterful feeling been encouraged by the envy and jealousy stirred in me, when I found Eunice (my inferior in every respect) distinguished by the devotion of a handsome lover, and having a brilliant marriage in view—while I was left neglected, with no prospect of changing my title from Miss to Mrs.? Vain inquiries! My wicked heart seems to have secrets of its own, and to keep them a mystery to me.

What has become of my excellent education?

I don't care to inquire; I have got beyond

the reach of good books and righteous examples. Among my other blameable actions there may now be reckoned disobedience to my father. I have been reading novels in secret.

At first I tried some of the famous English works, published at a price within the reach of small purses. Very well written, no doubt—but with one unpardonable drawback, so far as I am concerned. Our celebrated native authors address themselves to good people, or to penitent people who want to be made good ; not to wicked readers like me.

Arriving at this conclusion, I tried another experiment. In a small bookseller's shop I discovered some cheap translations of French novels. Here, I found what I wanted—sympathy with sin. Here, there was opened to me a new world inhabited entirely by unrepentant people ; the magnificent women diabolically beautiful ; the satanic men dead

to every sense of virtue, and alive—perhaps rather dirtily alive—to the splendid fascinations of crime. I know now that Love is above everything but itself. Love is the one law that we are all bound to obey. How deep! how consoling! how admirably true! The novelists of England have reason indeed to hide their heads before the novelists of France. All that I have felt, and have written here, is inspired by these wonderful authors.

I have relieved my mind, and may now return to the business of my diary—the record of domestic events.

An overwhelming disappointment has fallen on Eunice. Our dinner-party has been put off.

The state of father's health is answerable for this change in our arrangements. That wretched scene at the school, complicated by my sister's undutiful behaviour at the time,

so seriously excited him that he passed a sleepless night, and kept his bedroom throughout the day. Eunice's total want of discretion added, no doubt, to his sufferings : she rudely intruded on him to express her regret and to ask his pardon. Having carried her point, she was at leisure to come to me, and to ask (how amazingly simple of her !) what she and Philip were to do next.

‘We had arranged it all so nicely,’ the poor wretch began. ‘Philip was to have been so clever and agreeable at dinner, and was to have chosen his time so very discreetly, that Papa would have been ready to listen to anything he said. Oh, we should have succeeded ; I haven't a doubt of it ! Our only hope, Helena, is in you. What are we to do now ?’

‘Wait,’ I answered.

‘Wait ?’ she repeated hotly. ‘Is my heart to be broken ? and, what is more cruel still, is Philip to be disappointed ? I expected

something more sensible, my dear, from you. What possible reason can there be for waiting ?'

The reason—if I could only have mentioned it—was beyond dispute. I wanted time to quiet Philip's uneasy conscience, and to harden his weak mind against outbursts of violence, on Eunice's part, which would certainly exhibit themselves when she found that she had lost her lover, and lost him to me. In the meanwhile, I had to produce my reason for advising her to wait. It was easily done. I reminded her of the irritable condition of our father's nerves, and gave it as my opinion that he would certainly say No, if she was unwise enough to excite him on the subject of Philip, in his present frame of mind.

These unanswerable considerations seemed to produce the right effect on her. 'I suppose you know best,' was all she said. And then she left me.

I let her go without feeling any distrust of

this act of submission on her part ; it was such a common experience, in my life, to find my sister guiding herself by my advice. But experience is not always to be trusted. Events soon showed that I had failed to estimate Eunice's resources of obstinacy and cunning at their true value.

Half an hour later I heard the street door closed, and looked out of the window. Miss Jillgall was leaving the house ; no one was with her. My dislike of this person led me astray once more. I ought to have suspected her of being bent on some mischievous errand, and to have devised some means of putting my suspicions to the test. I did nothing of the kind. In the moment when I turned my head away from the window, Miss Jillgall was a person forgotten—and I was a person who had made a serious mistake.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HELENA'S DIARY.

THE event of to-day began with the delivery of a message summoning me to my father's study. He had decided—too hastily, as I feared—that he was sufficiently recovered to resume his usual employments. I was writing to his dictation, when we were interrupted. Maria announced a visit from Mr. Dunboyne.

Hitherto, Philip had been content to send one of the servants of the hotel to make inquiry after Mr. Gracedieu's health. Why had he now called personally? Noticing that father seemed to be annoyed, I tried to make an opportunity of receiving Philip myself.

‘Let me see him,’ I suggested ; ‘I can easily say you are engaged.’

Very unwillingly, as it was easy to see, my father declined to allow this. ‘Mr. Dunboyne’s visit pays me a compliment,’ he said ; ‘and I must receive him.’ I made a show of leaving the room, and was called back to my chair. ‘This is not a private interview, Helena ; stay where you are.’

Philip came in—handsomer than ever, beautifully dressed—and paid his respects to my father with his customary grace. He was too well bred to allow any visible signs of embarrassment to escape him. But when he shook hands with me, I felt a little trembling in his fingers, through the delicate gloves which fitted him like a second skin. Was it the true object of his visit to try the experiment designed by Eunice and himself, and deferred by the postponement of our dinner-party ? Impossible surely that my sister

could have practised on his weakness, and persuaded him to return to his first love! I waited, in breathless interest, for his next words. They were not worth listening to. Oh, the poor commonplace creature!

‘I am glad, Mr. Gracedieu, to see that you are well enough to be in your study again,’ he said. The writing materials on the table attracted his attention. ‘Am I one of the idle people,’ he asked, with his charming smile, ‘who are always interrupting useful employment?’

He spoke to my father, and he was answered by my father. Not once had he addressed a word to me—no, not even when we shook hands. I was angry enough to force him into taking some notice of me, and to make an attempt to confuse him at the same time.

‘Have you seen my sister?’ I asked.

‘No.’

It was the shortest reply that he could

choose. Having flung it at me, he still persisted in looking at my father and speaking to my father : ' Do you think of trying change of air, Mr. Gracedieu, when you feel strong enough to travel ?'

' My duties keep me here,' father answered ; ' and I cannot honestly say that I enjoy travelling. I dislike manners and customs that are strange to me ; I don't find that hotels reward me for giving up the comforts of my own house. How do you find the hotel here ?'

' I submit to the hotel, sir. They are sad savages in the kitchen ; they put mushroom ketchup into their soup, and mustard and cayenne pepper into their salads. I am half starved at dinner-time, but I don't complain.'

Every word he said was an offence to me. With or without reason, I attacked him again.

' I have heard you acknowledge that the landlord and landlady are very obliging people,' I said. ' Why don't you ask them to let you

make your own soup and mix your own salad ?’

I wondered whether I should succeed in attracting his notice, after this. Even in these private pages, my self-esteem finds it hard to confess what happened. I succeeded in reminding Philip that he had his reasons for requesting me to leave the room.

‘Will you excuse me, Miss Helena,’ he said, ‘if I ask leave to speak to Mr. Gracedieu in private ?’

The right thing for me to do was, let me hope, the thing that I did. I rose, and waited to see if my father would interfere. He looked at Philip with suspicion in his face, as well as surprise. ‘May I ask,’ he said coldly, ‘what is the object of the interview ?’

‘Certainly,’ Philip answered, ‘when we are alone.’ This cool reply placed my father between two alternatives ; he must either give way, or be guilty of an act of rudeness to a

guest in his own house. The choice reserved for me was narrower still—I had to decide between being told to go, or going of my own accord. Of course, I left them together.

The door which communicated with the next room was pulled to, but not closed. On the other side of it, I found Eunice.

‘Listening!’ I said, in a whisper.

‘Yes,’ she whispered back. ‘You listen, too!’

I was so indignant with Philip, and so seriously interested in what was going on in the study, that I yielded to temptation. We both degraded ourselves. We both listened.

Eunice’s base lover spoke first. Judging by the change in his voice, he must have seen something in my father’s face that daunted him. Eunice heard it too. ‘He’s getting nervous,’ she whispered; ‘he’ll forget to say the right thing at the right time.’

‘Mr. Gracedieu,’ Philip began, ‘I wish to speak to you——’

Father interrupted him : ‘We are alone now, Mr. Dunboyne. I want to know why you consult me in private.’

‘I am anxious to consult you, sir, on a subject——’

‘On what subject ? Any religious difficulty ?’

‘No.’

‘Anything I can do for you in the town ?’

‘Not at all. If you will only allow me——’

‘I am still waiting, sir, to know what it is about.’

Philip’s voice suddenly became an angry voice. ‘Once for all, Mr. Gracedieu,’ he said, ‘will you let me speak ? It’s about your daughter——’

‘No more of it, Mr. Dunboyne!’ (My father was now as loud as Philip.) ‘I don’t

desire to hold a private conversation with you on the subject of my daughter.'

'If you have any personal objection to me, sir, be so good as to state it plainly.'

'You have no right to ask me to do that.'

'You refuse to do it?'

'Positively.'

'You are not very civil, Mr. Gracedieu.'

'If I speak without ceremony, Mr. Dunboyne, you have yourself to thank for it.'

Philip replied to this in a tone of savage irony. 'You are a minister of religion, and you are an old man. Two privileges—and you presume on them both. Good-morning.'

I drew back into a corner, just in time to escape discovery in the character of a listener. Eunice never moved. When Philip dashed into the room, banging the door after him, she threw herself impulsively on his breast: 'Oh, Philip! Philip! what have you done? Why didn't you keep your temper?'

‘Did you hear what your father said to me?’ he asked.

‘Yes, dear; but you ought to have controlled yourself—you ought, indeed, for my sake.’

Her arms were still round him. It struck me that he felt her influence. ‘If you wish me to recover myself,’ he said gently, ‘you had better let me go.’

‘Oh, how cruel, Philip, to leave me when I am so wretched! Why do you want to go?’

‘You told me just now what I ought to do,’ he answered, still restraining himself. ‘If I am to get the better of my temper, I must be left alone.’

‘I never said anything about your temper, darling.’

‘Didn’t you tell me to control myself?’

‘Oh, yes! Go back to Papa, and beg him to forgive you.’

‘I’ll see him damned first!’

If ever a stupid girl deserved such an answer as this, the girl was my sister. I had hitherto (with some difficulty) refrained from interfering. But when Eunice tried to follow Philip out of the house, I could hesitate no longer; I held her back. 'You fool,' I said; 'haven't you made mischief enough already?'

'What am I to do?' she burst out helplessly.

'Do what I told you to do yesterday—wait.'

Before she could reply, or I could say anything more, the door that led to the landing was opened softly and slyly, and Miss Jillgall peeped in. Eunice instantly left me, and ran to the meddling old maid. They whispered to each other. Miss Jillgall's skinny arm encircled my sister's waist; they disappeared together.

I was only too glad to get rid of them both, and to take the opportunity of writing to

Philip I insisted on an explanation of his conduct while I was in the study—to be given within an hour's time, at a place which I appointed. 'You are not to attempt to justify yourself in writing,' I added in conclusion. 'Let your reply merely inform me if you can keep the appointment. The rest, when we meet.'

Maria took the letter to the hotel, with instructions to wait.

Philip's reply reached me without delay. It pledged him to justify himself as I had desired, and to keep the appointment. My own belief is that the event of to-day will decide his future and mine.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EUNICE'S DIARY.

INDEED, I am a most unfortunate creature; everything turns out badly with me. My good true friend, my dear Selina, has become the object of a hateful doubt in my secret mind. I am afraid she is keeping something from me.

Talking with her about my troubles, I heard for the first time that she had written again to Mrs. Tenbruggen. The object of her letter was to tell her friend of my engagement to young Mr. Dunboyne. I asked her why she had done this. The answer informed me that there was no knowing, in the present

state of my affairs, how soon I might not want the help of a clever woman. I ought, I suppose, to have been satisfied with this. But there seemed to be something not fully explained yet.

Then again, after telling Selina what I heard in the study, and how roughly Philip had spoken to me afterwards, I asked her what she thought of it. She made an incomprehensible reply : ‘ My sweet child, I mustn’t think of it—I am too fond of you.’

It was impossible to make her explain what this meant. She began to talk of Philip ; assuring me (which was quite needless) that she had done her best to fortify and encourage him, before he called on Papa. When I asked her to help me in another way—that is to say, when I wanted to find out where Philip was at that moment—she had no advice to give me. I told her that I should not enjoy a moment’s ease of mind until I and my dear

one were reconciled. She only shook her head, and declared that she was sorry for me. When I hit on the idea of ringing for Maria, this little woman, so bright and quick and eager to help me at other times, said : ' I leave it to you, dear,' and turned to the piano (close to which I was sitting), and played softly and badly stupid little tunes.

' Maria, did you open the door for Mr. Dunboyne when he went away just now ?'

' No, Miss.'

Nothing but ill-luck for me ! If I had been left to my own devices, I should now have let the housemaid go. But Selina contrived to give me a hint, on a strange plan of her own. Still at the piano, she began to confuse talking to herself with playing to herself. The notes went *tinkle, tinkle*—and the tongue mixed up words with the notes in this way : ' Perhaps they have been talking in the kitchen about Philip ?'

The suggestion was not lost on me. I said to Maria—who was standing at the other end of the room, near the door—‘Did you happen to hear which way Mr. Dunboyne went when he left us.’

‘I know where he was, Miss, half an hour ago.’

‘Where was he?’

‘At the hotel.’

Selina went on with her hints in the same way as before. ‘How does she know—ah, how does she know?’ was the vocal part of the performance this time. My clever inquiries followed the vocal part as before :

‘How do you know that Mr. Dunboyne was at the hotel?’

‘I was sent there with a letter for him, and waited for the answer.’

There was no suggestion required this time. The one possible question was : ‘Who sent you?’

Maria replied, after first reserving a condition : ‘ You won’t tell upon me, Miss?’

I promised not to tell. Selina suddenly left off playing.

‘ Well,’ I repeated, ‘ who sent you?’

‘ Miss Helena.’

Selina looked round at me. Her little eyes seemed to have suddenly become big, they stared me so strangely in the face. I don’t know whether she was in a state of fright or of wonder. As for myself, I simply lost the use of my tongue. Maria, having no more questions to answer, discreetly left us together.

Why should Helena write to Philip at all—and especially without mentioning it to me? Here was a riddle which was more than I could guess. I asked Selina to help me. She might at least have tried, I thought ; but she looked uneasy, and made excuses.

I said : ‘ Suppose I go to Helena, and ask

her why she wrote to Philip ?' And Selina said : ' Suppose you do, dear.'

I rang for Maria once more : ' Do you know where my sister is ?'

' Just gone out, Miss.'

There was no help for it but to wait till she came back, and to get through the time in the interval as I best might. But for one circumstance, I might not have known what to do. The truth is, there was a feeling of shame in me when I remembered having listened at the study door. Curious notions come into one's head—one doesn't know how or why. It struck me that I might make a kind of atonement for having been mean enough to listen, if I went to Papa, and offered to keep him company in his solitude. If we fell into pleasant talk, I had a sly idea of my own—I meant to put in a good word for poor Philip.

When I confided my design to Selina, she shut up the piano and ran across the room to

me. But somehow she was not like her old self again, yet.

‘You good little soul, you are always right. Look at me again, Euneece. Are you beginning to doubt me? Oh, my darling, don’t do that! It isn’t using me fairly. I can’t bear it—I can’t bear it!’

I took her hand; I was on the point of speaking to her with the kindness she deserved from me. On a sudden she snatched her hand away, and ran back to the piano. When she was seated on the music-stool, her face was hidden from me. At that moment she broke into a strange cry—it began like a laugh, and it ended like a sob.

‘Go away to Papa! Don’t mind me—I’m a creature of impulse—ha! ha! ha! a little hysterical—the state of the weather—I get rid of these weaknesses, my dear, by singing to myself. I have a favourite song: “My heart is light, my will is free.”—Go away! oh, for God’s sake, go away!’

I had heard of hysterics, of course ; knowing nothing about them, however, by my own experience. What could have happened to agitate her in this extraordinary manner?

Had Helena's letter anything to do with it ? Was my sister indignant with Philip for swearing in my presence ; and had she written him an angry letter, in her zeal on my behalf ? But Selina could not possibly have seen the letter—and Helena (who is often hard on me when I do stupid things) showed little indulgence for me, when I was so unfortunate as to irritate Philip. I gave up the hopeless attempt to get at the truth by guessing, and went away to forget my troubles, if I could, in my father's society.

After knocking twice at the door of the study, and receiving no reply, I ventured to look in.

The sofa in this room stood opposite the door. Papa was resting on it, but not in

comfort. There were twitching movements in his feet, and he shifted his arms this way and that as if no restful posture could be found for them. But what frightened me was this. His eyes, staring straight at the door by which I had gone in, had an inquiring expression, as if he actually did not know me ! I stood midway between the door and the sofa, doubtful about going nearer to him.

He said : ‘ Who is it ? ’ This to me—to his own daughter. He said : ‘ What do you want ? ’

I really could *not* bear it. I went up to him. I said : ‘ Papa, have you forgotten Eunice ? ’

My name seemed (if one may say such a thing) to bring him to himself again. He sat up on the sofa—and laughed as he answered me.

‘ My dear child, what delusion has got into that pretty little head of yours ? Fancy her

thinking that I had forgotten my own daughter! I was lost in thought, Eunice. For the moment, I was what they call an absent man. Did I ever tell you the story of the absent man? He went to call upon some acquaintance of his; and when the servant said, "What name, sir?" he couldn't answer. He was obliged to confess that he had forgotten his own name. The servant said, "That's very strange." The absent man at once recovered himself. "That's it!" he said: "my name is Strange." Droll, isn't it? If I had been calling on a friend to-day, I dare say *I* might have forgotten my name, too. Much to think of, Eunice—too much to think of.'

Leaving the sofa with a sigh, as if he was tired of it, he began walking up and down. He seemed to be still in good spirits. 'Well, my dear,' he said, 'what can I do for you?'

'I came here, Papa, to see if there was anything I could do for You.'

He looked at some sheets of paper, strung together, and laid on the table. They were covered with writing (from his dictation) in my sister's hand. 'I ought to get on with my work,' he said. 'Where is Helena?'

I told him that she had gone out, and begged leave to try what I could do to supply her place.

The request seemed to please him ; but he wanted time to think. I waited ; noticing that his face grew gradually worried and anxious. There came a vacant look into his eyes which it grieved me to see ; he appeared to have quite lost himself again. 'Read the last page,' he said, pointing to the manuscript on the table ; 'I don't remember where I left off.'

I turned to the last page. As well as I could tell, it related to some publication, which he was recommending to religious persons of our way of thinking.

Before I had read half-way through it, he began to dictate, speaking so rapidly that my pen was not always able to follow him. My handwriting is as bad as bad can be when I am hurried. To make matters worse still, I was confused. What he was now saying seemed to have nothing to do with what I had been reading.

Let me try if I can call to mind the substance of it.

He began in the most strangely sudden way by asking : ‘ Why should there be any fear of discovery, when every possible care had been taken to prevent it ? The danger from unexpected events was far more disquieting. A man might find himself bound in honour to disclose what it had been the chief anxiety of his life to conceal. For example, could he let an innocent person be the victim of deliberate suppression of the truth — no matter how justifiable that suppression might appear to

be? On the other hand, dreadful consequences might follow an honourable confession. There might be a cruel sacrifice of tender affection ; there might be a shocking betrayal of innocent hope and trust.'

I remember those last words, just as he dictated them, because he suddenly stopped there ; looking, poor dear, distressed and confused. He put his hand to his head, and went back to the sofa.

'I'm tired,' he said. 'Wait for me while I rest.'

In a few minutes he fell asleep. It was a deep repose that came to him now ; and, though I don't think it lasted much longer than half an hour, it produced a wonderful change in him for the better when he woke. He spoke quietly and kindly ; and, when he returned to me at the table, and looked at the page on which I had been writing, he smiled.

‘Oh, my dear, what bad writing ! I declare I can’t read what I myself told you to write. No ! no ! don’t be down-hearted about it. You are not used to writing from dictation ; and I dare say I have been too quick for you.’ He kissed me and encouraged me. ‘You know how fond I am of my little girl,’ he said ; ‘I am afraid I like my Eunice just the least in the world more than I like my Helena. Ah, you are beginning to look a little happier now !’

He had filled me with such confidence and such pleasure that I could not help thinking of my sweetheart. Oh dear, when shall I learn to be distrustful of my own feelings ? The temptation to say a good word for Philip quite mastered any little discretion that I possessed.

I said to Papa : ‘If you knew how to make me happier than I have ever been in all my life before, would you do it ?’

‘Of course I would.’

‘Then send for Philip, dear, and be a little kinder to him, this time.’

His pale face turned red with anger ; he pushed me away from him.

‘That man again !’ he burst out. ‘Am I never to hear the last of him ? Go away, Eunice. You are of no use here.’ He took up my unfortunate page of writing, and ridiculed it with a bitter laugh. ‘What is this fit for ?’ He crumpled it up in his hand, and tossed it into the fire.

I ran out of the room in such a state of mortification that I hardly knew what I was about. If some hard-hearted person had come to me with a cup of poison, and had said : ‘Eunice, you are not fit to live any longer ; take this,’ I do believe I should have taken it. If I thought of anything, I thought of going back to Selina. My ill luck still pursued me ; she had disappeared. I looked about in a

helpless way, completely at a loss what to do next—so stupefied, I may even say, that it was some time before I noticed a little three-cornered note on the table by which I was standing. The note was addressed to me :

‘EVER-DEAREST EUNEECE,

‘I have tried to make myself useful to you, and have failed. But how can I see the sad sight of your wretchedness, and not feel the impulse to try again ? I have gone to the hotel to find Philip, and to bring him back to you a penitent and faithful man. Wait for me, and hope for great things. A hundred thousand kisses to my sweet Euneece.

‘S. J.’

Wait for her, after reading that note ! How could she expect it ? I had only to follow her, and to find Philip. In another minute, I was on my way to the hotel.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HELENA'S DIARY.

LOOKING at the last entry in my Journal, I see myself anticipating that the event of to-day will decide Philip's future and mine. This has proved prophetic. All further concealment is now at an end.

Forced to it by fate, or helped to it by chance, Eunice has made the discovery of her lover's infidelity. 'In all human probability' (as my father says in his sermons), we two sisters are enemies for life.

I am not suspected, as Eunice is, of making appointments with a sweetheart. So I am free

to go out alone, and to go where I please. Philip and I were punctual to our appointment this afternoon.

Our place of meeting was in a secluded corner of the town park. We found a rustic seat in our retirement, set up (one would suppose) as a concession to the taste of visitors who are fond of solitude. The view in front of us was bounded by the park wall and railings, and our seat was prettily approached on one side by a plantation of young trees. No entrance-gate was near; no carriage road crossed the grass. A more safe and more solitary nook for conversation, between two persons desiring to be alone, it would be hard to find in most public parks. Lovers are said to know it well, and to be especially fond of it towards evening. We were there in broad daylight, and we had the seat to ourselves.

My memory of what passed between us is, in some degree, disturbed by the formidable

interruption which brought our talk to an end.

But among other things, I remember that I showed him no mercy at the outset. At one time I was indignant ; at another I was scornful. I declared, in regard to my object in meeting him, that I had changed my mind, and had decided to shorten a disagreeable interview by waiving my right to an explanation, and bidding him farewell. Eunice, as I pointed out, had the first claim to him ; Eunice was much more likely to suit him, as a companion for life, than I was. 'In short,' I said, in conclusion, 'my inclination for once takes sides with my duty, and leaves my sister in undisturbed possession of young Mr. Dunboyne.' With this satirical explanation, I rose to say good-bye.

I had merely intended to irritate him. He showed a superiority to anger for which I was not prepared.

‘Be so kind as to sit down again,’ he said quietly.

He took my letter from his pocket, and pointed to that part of it which alluded to his conduct, when we had met in my father’s study.

‘You have offered me the opportunity of saying a word in my own defence,’ he went on. ‘I prize that privilege far too highly to consent to your withdrawing it, merely because you have changed your mind. Let me at least tell you what my errand was, when I called on your father. Loving you, and you only, I had forced myself to make a last effort to be true to your sister. Remember that, Helena, and then say—is it wonderful if I was beside myself, when I found You in the study?’

‘When you tell me you were beside yourself,’ I said, ‘do you mean, ashamed of yourself?’

That touched him. ‘I mean nothing of the

kind,' he burst out. 'After the hell on earth in which I have been living between you two sisters, a man hasn't virtue enough left in him to be ashamed. He's half mad—that's what he is. Look at my position! I had made up my mind never to see you again; I had made up my mind (if I married Eunice) to rid myself of my own miserable life when I could endure it no longer. In that state of feeling, when my sense of duty depended on my speaking with Mr. Gracedieu alone, whose was the first face I saw when I entered the room? If I had dared to look at you, or to speak to you, what do you think would have become of my resolution to sacrifice myself?'

'What has become of it now?' I asked.

'Tell me first if I am forgiven,' he said—
'and you shall know.'

'Do you deserve to be forgiven?'

It has been discovered by wiser heads than mine that weak people are always in extremes.

So far, I had seen Philip in the vain and violent extreme. He now shifted suddenly to the sad and submissive extreme. When I asked him if he deserved to be forgiven, he made the humblest of all replies—he sighed and said nothing.

‘If I did my duty to my sister,’ I reminded him, ‘I should refuse to forgive you, and send you back to Eunice.’

‘Your father’s language and your father’s conduct,’ he answered, ‘have released me from that entanglement. I can never go back to Eunice. If you refuse to forgive me, neither you nor she will see anything more of Philip Dunboyne ; I promise you that. Are you satisfied now ?’

After holding out against him resolutely, I felt myself beginning to yield. When a man has once taken their fancy, what helplessly weak creatures women are ! I saw through his vacillating weakness—and yet I trusted

him, with both eyes open. My looking-glass is opposite to me while I write. It shows me a contemptible Helena. I lied, and said I was satisfied—to please *him*.

‘Am I forgiven?’ he asked.

It is absurd to put it on record. Of course I forgave him. What a good Christian I am, after all!

He took my willing hand. ‘My lovely darling,’ he said, ‘our marriage rests with you. Whether your father approves of it or not, say the word ; claim me, and I am yours for life.’

I must have been infatuated by his voice and his look ; my heart must have been burning under the pressure of his hand on mine. Was it my modesty or my self-control that deserted me ? I let him take me in his arms. Again, and again, and again I kissed him. We were deaf to what we ought to have heard ; we were blind to what we ought to have seen. Before we were conscious of a

movement among the trees, we were discovered. My sister flew at me like a wild animal. Her furious hands fastened themselves on my throat. Philip started to his feet. When he touched her, in the act of forcing her back from me, Eunice's raging strength became utter weakness in an instant. Her arms fell helpless at her sides—her head drooped—she looked at him in a silence which was dreadful, at such a moment as that. He shrank from the unendurable reproach in those tearless eyes. Meanly, he turned away from her. Meanly, I followed him. Looking back for an instant, I saw her step forward ; perhaps to stop him, perhaps to speak to him. The effort was too much for her strength ; she staggered back against the trunk of a tree. Like strangers, walking separate one from the other, we left her to her companion—the hideous traitress who was my enemy and her friend.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HELENA'S DIARY.

ON reaching the street which led to Philip's hotel, we spoke to each other for the first time.

‘What are we to do?’ I said.

‘Leave this place,’ he answered.

‘Together?’ I asked.

‘Yes.’

To leave us (for awhile), after what had happened, might be the wisest thing which a man, in Philip's critical position, could do. But if I went with him—unprovided as I was with any friend of my own sex, whose character and presence might sanction the step

I had taken—I should be lost beyond redemption. Is any man that ever lived worth that sacrifice? I thought of my father's house closed to me, and of our friends ashamed of me. I have owned, in some earlier part of my Journal, that I am not very patient under domestic cares. But the possibility of Eunice being appointed housekeeper, with my power, in my place, was more than I could calmly contemplate. 'No,' I said to Philip. 'Your absence, at such a time as this, may help us both; but, come what may of it, I must remain at home.'

He yielded, without an attempt to make me alter my mind. There was a sullen submission in his manner which it was not pleasant to see. Was he despairing already of himself and of me? Had Eunice aroused the watchful demons of shame and remorse?

'Perhaps you are right,' he said gloomily. 'Good-bye.'

My anxiety put the all-important question to him without hesitation :

‘ Is it good-bye for ever, Philip ?’

His reply instantly relieved me : ‘ God forbid !’

But I wanted more : ‘ You still love me ?’ I persisted.

‘ More dearly than ever !’

‘ And yet you leave me ?’

He turned pale. ‘ I leave you because I am afraid.’

‘ Afraid of what ?’

‘ Afraid to face Eunice again.’

The only possible way out of our difficulty that I could see, now occurred to me. ‘ Suppose my sister can be prevailed on to give you up ?’ I suggested. ‘ Would you come back to us in that case ?’

Certainly !’

And you would ask my father to consent to our marriage ?’

‘On the day of my return, if you like.’

‘Suppose obstacles get in our way,’ I said — ‘suppose time passes and tries your patience — will you still consider yourself engaged to me?’

‘Engaged to you,’ he answered, ‘in spite of obstacles and in spite of time.’

‘And, while you are away from me,’ I ventured to add, ‘we shall write to each other?’

‘Go where I may,’ he said, ‘you shall always hear from me.’

I could ask no more ; and he could concede no more. The impression evidently left on him by Eunice’s terrible outbreak, was far more serious than I had anticipated. I was myself depressed and ill at ease. No expressions of tenderness were exchanged between us. There was something horrible in our barren farewell. We merely clasped hands, at parting. He went his way — and I went mine.

There are some occasions when women set an example of courage to men. I was ready to endure whatever might happen to me, when I got home. What a desperate wretch! some people might say, if they could look into this diary.

Maria opened the door; she told me that my sister had already returned, accompanied by Miss Jillgall. There had been apparently some difference of opinion between them, before they entered the house. Eunice had attempted to go on to some other place; and Miss Jillgall had remonstrated. Maria had heard her say: 'No, you would degrade yourself'—and, with that, she had led Eunice indoors. I understood, of course, that my sister had been prevented from following Philip to the hotel. There was probably a serious quarrel in store for me. I went straight to the bedroom, expecting to find Eunice there, and prepared to brave the storm that

might burst on me. There was a woman at Eunice's end of the room, removing dresses from the wardrobe. I could only see her back, but it was impossible to mistake *that* figure—Miss Jillgall.

She laid the dresses on Eunice's bed, without taking the slightest notice of me. In significant silence I pointed to the door. She went on as coolly with her occupation as if the room had been, not mine but hers; I stepped up to her, and spoke plainly.

‘You oblige me to remind you,’ I said, ‘that you are not in your own room.’ There, I waited a little, and found that I had produced no effect. ‘With every disposition,’ I resumed, ‘to make allowance for the disagreeable peculiarities of your character, I cannot consent to overlook an act of intrusion, committed by a Spy. Now, do you understand me?’

She looked round her. ‘I see no third

person here,' she said. 'May I ask if you mean me?'

'I mean you.'

'Will you be so good, Miss Helena, as to explain yourself?'

Moderation of language would have been thrown away on this woman. 'You followed me to the park,' I said. 'It was you who found me with Mr. Dunboyne, and betrayed me to my sister. You are a Spy, and you know it. At this very moment you daren't look me in the face.'

Her insolence forced its way out of her at last. Let me record it—and repay it, when the time comes.

'Quite true,' she replied. 'If I ventured to look you in the face, I am afraid I might forget myself. I have always been brought up like a lady, and I wish to show it even in the company of such a wretch as you are. There is not one word of truth in what you have

said of me. I went to the hotel to find Mr. Dunboyne. Ah, you may sneer ! I haven't got your good looks—and a vile use you have made of them. My object was to recall that base young man to his duty to my dear charming injured Euneece. The hotel servant told me that Mr. Dunboyne had gone out. Oh, I had the means of persuasion in my pocket ! The man directed me to the park, as he had already directed Mr. Dunboyne. It was only when I had found the place, that I heard some one behind me. Poor innocent Euneece had followed me to the hotel, and had got her directions, as I had got mine. God knows how hard I tried to persuade her to go back, and how horribly frightened I was—No ! I won't distress myself by saying a word more. It would be too humiliating to let *you* see an honest woman in tears. Your sister has a spirit of her own, thank God ! She won't inhabit the same room with you ; she never

desires to see your false face again. I take the poor soul's dresses and things away—and as a religious person I wait, confidently wait, for the judgment that will fall on you !'

She caught up the dresses all together ; some of them were in her arms, some of them fell on her shoulders, and one of them towered over her head. Smothered in gowns, she bounced out of the room like a walking milliner's shop. I have to thank the wretched old creature for a moment of genuine amusement, at a time of devouring anxiety. The meanest insect, they say, has its use in this world—and why not Miss Jillgall ?

In half an hour more, an unexpected event raised my spirits. I heard from Philip.

On his return to the hotel he had found a telegram waiting for him. Mr. Dunboyne the elder had arrived in London ; and Philip had arranged to join his father by the next train. He sent me the address, and begged

that I would write and tell him my news from home by the next day's post.

Welcome, thrice welcome to Mr. Dunboyne the elder ! If Philip can manage, under my advice, to place me favourably in the estimation of this rich old man, his presence and authority may do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Here is surely an influence to which my father must submit, no matter how unreasonable or how angry he may be when he hears what has happened. I begin already to feel hopeful of the future.

CHAPTER XXX.

EUNICE'S DIARY.

THROUGH the day, and through the night, I feel a misery that never leaves me—I mean the misery of fear.

I am trying to find out some harmless means of employing myself, which will keep evil remembrances from me. If I don't succeed, my fear tells me what will happen. I shall be in danger of going mad.

I dare not confide in any living creature. I don't know what other persons might think of me, or how soon I might find myself perhaps in an asylum. In this helpless condition, doubt and fright seem to be driving

me back to my Journal. I wonder whether I shall find harmless employment here.

I have heard of old people losing their memories. What would I not give to be old ! I remember ! oh, how I remember ! One day after another I see Philip, I see Helena, as I first saw them when I was among the trees in the park. My sweetheart's arms, that once held me, hold my sister now. She kisses him, kisses him, kisses him.

Is there no way of making myself see something else ? I want to get back to remembrances that don't burn in my head, and tear at my heart. How is it to be done ?

I have tried books—no ! I have tried going out to look at the shops—no ! I have tried saying my prayers—no ! And now I am making my last effort ; trying my pen. My black letters fall from it, and take their places on the white paper. Will my black letters

help me? Where can I find something consoling to write down? Where? Where?

Selina—poor Selina, so fond of me, so sorry for me. When I was happy, she was happy too. It was always amusing to hear her talk. Oh, my memory, be good to me! Save me from Philip and Helena. I want to remember the pleasant days when my kind little friend and I used to gossip in the garden.

No: the days in the garden won't come back. What else can I think of?

* * * * *

The recollections that I try to encourage keep away from me. The other recollections that I dread, come crowding back. Still Philip! Still Helena!

But Selina mixes herself up with them. Let me try again if I can think of Selina.

How delightfully good to me and patient with me she was, on our dismal way home from the park! And how affectionately she

excused herself for not having warned me of it, when she first suspected that my own sister and my worst enemy were one and the same !

‘I know I was wrong, my dear, to let my love and pity close my lips. But remember how happy you were at the time. The thought of making you miserable was more than I could endure—I am so fond of you ! Yes ; I began to suspect them, on the day when they first met at the station. And, I am afraid, I thought it just likely that you might be as cunning as I was, and have noticed them too.’

Oh, how ignorant she must have been of my true thoughts and feelings ! How strangely people seem to misunderstand their dearest friends ! Knowing, as I did, that I could never love any man but Philip, could I be wicked enough to suppose that Philip would love any woman but me ?

I explained to Selina how he had spoken to me, when we were walking together on the bank of the river. Shall I ever forget those exquisite words? 'I wish I was a better man, Eunice; I wish I was good enough to be worthy of you.' I asked Selina if she thought he was deceiving me when he said that. She comforted me by owning that he must have been in earnest, at the time—and then she distressed me by giving the reason why.

'My love, you must have innocently said something to him, when you and he were alone, which touched his conscience (when he *had* a conscience), and made him ashamed of himself. Ah, you were too fond of him to see how he changed for the worse, when your vile sister joined you, and took possession of him again! It made my heart ache to see you so unsuspecting of them. You asked me, my poor dear, if they had quarrelled—you

believed they were tired of walking by the river, when it was you they were tired of—and you wondered why Helena took him to see the school. My child! she was the leading spirit at the school, and you were nobody. Her vanity saw the chance of making him compare you at a disadvantage with your clever sister. I declare, Euneece, I lose my head if I only think of it! All the strong points in my character seem to slip away from me. Would you believe it?—I have neglected that sweet infant at the cottage; I have even let Mrs. Molly have her baby back again. If I had the making of the laws, Philip Dunboyne and Helena Gracedieu should be hanged together on the same gallows. I see I shock you. Don't let us talk of it! Oh, don't let us talk of it!

And here am I writing of it! What I had determined not to do, is what I have done. Am I losing my senses already? The very

names that I was most anxious to keep out of my memory, stare me in the face in the lines that I have just written. Philip again ! Helena again !

* * * * *

Another day ; and something new that must and will be remembered, shrink from it as I may. This afternoon, I met Helena on the stairs.

She stopped, and eyed me with a wicked smile ; she held out her hand. ‘ We are likely to meet often, while we are in the same house,’ she said ; ‘ hadn’t we better consult appearances, and pretend to be as fond of each other as ever ?’

I took no notice of her hand ; I took no notice of her shameless proposal. She tried again : ‘ After all, it isn’t my fault if Philip likes me better than he likes you. Don’t you see that ?’ I still refused to speak to her. She still persisted. ‘ How black you look,

Eunice ! Are you sorry you didn't kill me, when you had your hands on my throat ?'

I said : ' Yes.'

She laughed, and left me. I was obliged to sit down on the stair—I trembled so. My own reply frightened me. I tried to find out why I had said Yes. I don't remember being conscious of meaning anything. It was as if somebody else had said Yes—not I. Perhaps I was provoked, and the word escaped me before I could stop it. Could I have stopped it ? I don't know.

* * * * *

Another sleepless night.

Did I pass the miserable hours in writing letters to Philip, and then tearing them up ? Or did I only fancy that I wrote to him ? I have just looked at the fireplace. The torn paper in it tells me that I did write. Why did I destroy my letters ? I might have sent

one of them to Philip. After what has happened ? Oh, no ! no !

Having been many days away from the Girls' Scripture Class, it seemed to be possible that going back to the school and the teaching might help me to escape from myself.

Nothing succeeds with me. I found it impossible to instruct the girls as usual ; their stupidity soon reached the limit of my patience—suffocated me with rage. One of them, a poor, fat, feeble creature, began to cry when I scolded her. I looked with envy at the tears rolling over her big round cheeks. If I could only cry, I might perhaps bear my hard fate with submission.

I walked towards home by a roundabout way ; feeling as if want of sleep was killing me by inches.

In the High Street, I saw Helena ; she was posting a letter, and was not aware that I was near her. Leaving the post-office, she crossed

the street, and narrowly escaped being run over. Suppose the threatened accident had really taken place—how should I have felt, if it had ended fatally? What a fool I am to be putting questions to myself about things that have not happened!

The walking tired me; I went straight home.

Before I could ring the bell, the house door opened, and the doctor came out. He stopped to speak to me. While I had been away (he said), something had happened at home (he neither knew nor wished to know what) which had thrown my father into a state of violent agitation. The doctor had administered composing medicine. ‘My patient is asleep now,’ he told me; ‘but remember what I said to you the last time we met; a longer rest than any doctor’s prescription can give him is what he wants. You are not looking well yourself, my dear. What is the matter?’

I told him of my wretched restless nights ; and asked if I might take some of the composing medicine which he had given to my father. He forbade me to touch a drop of it. ‘What is physic for your father, you foolish child, is not physic for a young creature like you,’ he said. ‘Count a thousand, if you can’t sleep to-night, or turn your pillow. I wish you pleasant dreams.’ He went away, amused at his own humour.

I found Selina waiting to speak with me, on the subject of poor Papa.

She had been startled on hearing his voice, loud in anger. In the fear that something serious had happened, she left her room to make inquiries, and saw Helena on the landing of the flight of stairs beneath, leaving the study. After waiting till my sister was out of the way, Selina ventured to present herself at the study door, and to ask if she could be of any use. My father, walking excitedly up

and down the room, declared that both his daughters had behaved infamously, and that he would not suffer them to speak to him again until they had come to their senses, on the subject of Mr. Dunboyne. He would enter into no further explanation; and he had ordered, rather than requested, Selina to leave him. Having obeyed, she tried next to find me, and had just looked into the dining-room to see if I was there, when she was frightened by the sound of a fall in the room above—that is to say, in the study. Running upstairs again, she had found him insensible on the floor, and had sent for the doctor.

‘And mind this,’ Selina continued, ‘the person who has done the mischief, is the person whom I saw leaving the study. What your unnatural sister said to provoke her father——’

‘That your unnatural sister will tell you herself,’ Helena’s voice added. She had

opened the door, while we were too much absorbed in our talk to hear her.

Selina attempted to leave the room. I caught her by the hand, and held her back. I was afraid of what I might do if she left me by myself. Never have I felt anything like the rage that tortured me, when I saw Helena looking at us with the same wicked smile on her lips that had insulted me when we met on the stairs. 'Have *we* anything to be ashamed of?' I said to Selina. 'Stay where you are.'

'You may be of some use, Miss Jillgall, if you stay,' my sister suggested. 'Eunice seems to be trembling. Is she angry, or is she ill?'

The sting of this was in the tone of her voice. It was the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life—but I did succeed in controlling myself.

'Go on with what you have to say,' I answered, 'and don't notice me.'

‘ You are not very polite, my dear, but I can make allowances. Oh, come ! come ! putting up your hands to stop your ears is too childish. You would do better to express regret for having misled your father. Yes ! you did mislead him. Only a few days since, you left him to suppose that you were engaged to Philip. It became my duty, after that, to open his eyes to the truth ; and if I unhappily provoked him, it was your fault. I was strictly careful in the language I used. I said : “ Dear father, you have been misinformed on a very serious subject. The only marriage engagement for which your kind sanction is requested, is *my* engagement. I have consented to become Mrs. Philip Dunboyne.” ’

‘ Stop ! ’ I said.

‘ Why am I to stop ? ’

‘ Because I have something to say. You and I are looking at each other. Does my face tell you what is passing in my mind ? ’

‘Your face seems to be paler than usual,’ she answered—‘that’s all.’

‘No,’ I said ; ‘that is not all. The devil that possessed me, when I discovered you with Philip, is not cast out of me yet. Silence the sneering devil that is in You, or we may both live to regret it.’

Whether I did or did not frighten her, I cannot say. This only I know — she turned away silently to the door, and went out.

I dropped on the sofa. That horrid hungering for revenge, which I felt for the first time when I knew how Helena had wronged me, began to degrade and tempt me again. In the effort to get away from this new evil self of mine, I tried to find sympathy in Selina, and called to her to come and sit by me. She seemed to be startled when I looked at her, but she recovered herself, and came to me, and took my hand.

‘I wish I could comfort you!’ she said, in her kind simple way.

‘Keep my hand in your hand,’ I told her ;
‘I am drowning in dark water—and I have nothing to hold by but you.’

‘Oh, my darling, don’t talk in that way!’

‘Good Selina ! dear Selina ! You shall talk to Me. Say something harmless—tell me a melancholy story—try to make me cry.’

My poor little friend looked sadly , bewildered.

‘I’m more likely to cry myself,’ she said.
‘This is so heart-breaking—I almost wish I was back in the time, before you came home, the time when your detestable sister first showed how she hated me. I was happy, meanly happy, in the spiteful enjoyment of provoking her. Oh, Euneece, I shall never recover my spirits again ! All the pity in the world would not be pity enough for *you*. So hardly treated ! so young ! so forlorn ! Your

good father too ill to help you; your poor mother——’

I interrupted her ; she had interested me in something better than my own wretched self. I asked directly if she had known my mother.

‘My dear child, I never even saw her!’

‘Has my father never spoken to you about her?’

‘Only once, when I asked him how long she had been dead. He told me you lost her while you were an infant, and he told me no more. I was looking at her portrait in the study, only yesterday. I think it must be a bad portrait ; your mother’s face disappoints me.’

I had arrived at the same conclusion years since. But I shrank from confessing it.

‘At any rate,’ Selina continued, ‘you are not like her. Nobody would ever guess that you were the child of that lady, with the long slanting forehead and the restless look in her eyes.’

What Selina had said of me and my mother's portrait, other friends had said. There was nothing that I know of to interest me in hearing it repeated—and yet it set me pondering on the want of resemblance between my mother's face and mine, and wondering (not for the first time) what sort of woman my mother was. When my father speaks of her, no words of praise that he can utter seem to be good enough for her. Oh, me, I wish I was a little more like my mother!

It began to get dark ; Maria brought in the lamp. The sudden brightness of the flame struck my aching eyes, as if it had been a blow from a knife. I was obliged to hide my face in my handkerchief. Compassionate Selina entreated me to go to bed. ' Rest your poor eyes, my child, and your weary head—and try at least to get some sleep.' She found me very docile ; I kissed her, and said good-night. I had my own idea.

When all was quiet in the house, I stole out into the passage, and listened at the door of my father's room.

I heard his regular breathing, and opened the door and went in. The composing medicine, of which I was in search, was not on the table by his bedside. I found it in the cupboard—perhaps placed purposely out of his reach. They say that some physic is poison, if you take too much of it. The label on the bottle told me what the dose was. I dropped it into the medicine glass, and swallowed it, and went back to my father.

Very gently, so as not to wake him, I touched poor Papa's forehead with my lips. 'I must have some of your medicine,' I whispered to him ; 'I want it, dear, as badly as you do.'

Then I returned to my own room—and lay down in bed, waiting to be composed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EUNICE'S DIARY.

MY restless nights are passed in Selina's room.

Her bed remains near the window. My bed has been placed opposite, near the door. Our night-light is hidden in a corner, so that the faint glow of it is all that we see. What trifles these are to write about ! But they mix themselves up with what I am determined to set down in my Journal, and then to close the book for good and all.

I had not disturbed my little friend's enviable repose, either when I left our bedchamber, or when I returned to it. The night was

quiet, and the stars were out. Nothing moved but the throbbing at my temples. The lights and shadows in our half-darkened room, which at other times suggest strange resemblances to my fancy, failed to disturb me now. I was in a darkness of my own making, having bound a handkerchief, cooled with water, over my hot eyes. There was nothing to interfere with the soothing influence of the dose that I had taken, if my father's medicine would only help me.

I began badly. The clock in the hall struck the quarter past the hour, the half-past, the three-quarters past, the new hour. Time was awake—and I was awake with Time.

It was such a trial to my patience that I thought of going back to my father's room, and taking a second dose of the medicine, no matter what the risk might be. On attempting to get up, I became aware of a change in

me. There was a dull sensation in my limbs which seemed to bind them down on the bed. It was the strangest feeling. My will said, Get up — and my heavy limbs said, No.

I lay quite still, thinking desperate thoughts, and getting nearer and nearer to the end that I had been dreading for so many days past. Having been as well educated as most girls, my lessons in history had made me acquainted with assassination and murder. Horrors which I had recoiled from reading in past happy days, now returned to my memory ; and, this time, they interested instead of revolting me. I counted the three first ways of killing as I happened to remember them, in my books of instruction :—a way by stabbing ; a way by poison ; a way in a bed, by suffocation with a pillow. On that dreadful night, I never once called to mind what I find myself remembering now—the harmless past time, when our friends

used to say : ' Eunice is a good girl ; we are all fond of Eunice.' Shall I ever be the same lovable creature again ?

While I lay thinking, a strange thing happened. Philip, who had haunted me for days and nights together, vanished out of my thoughts. My memory of the love which had begun so brightly, and had ended so miserably, became a blank. Nothing was left but my own horrid visions of vengeance and death.

For awhile, the strokes of the clock still reached my ears. But it was an effort to count them ; I ended in letting them pass unheeded. Soon afterwards, the round of my thoughts began to circle slowly and more slowly. The strokes of the clock died out. The round of my thoughts stopped.

All this time, my eyes were still covered by the handkerchief which I had laid over them.

The darkness began to weigh on my spirits, and to fill me with distrust. I found myself suspecting that there was some change—perhaps an unearthly change—passing over the room. To remain blindfolded any longer was more than I could endure. I lifted my hand—without being conscious of the heavy sensation which, some time before, had laid my limbs helpless on the bed—I lifted my hand, and drew the handkerchief away from my eyes.

The faint glow of the night-light was extinguished.

But the room was not quite dark. There was a ghastly light trembling over it ; like nothing that I have ever seen by day ; like nothing that I have ever seen by night. I dimly discerned Selina's bed, and the frame of the window, and the curtains on either side of it—but not the starlight, and not the shadowy tops of the trees in the garden.

The light grew fainter and fainter ; the objects in the room faded slowly away. Darkness came.

It may be a saying hard to believe—but, when I declare that I was not frightened, I am telling the truth. Whether the room was lit by awful light, or sunk in awful dark, I was equally interested in the expectation of what might happen next. I listened calmly for what I might hear : I waited calmly for what I might feel.

A touch came first. I felt it creeping on my face—like a little fluttering breeze. The sensation pleased me for a while. Soon it grew colder, and colder, and colder, till it froze me.

‘ Oh, no more !’ I cried out. ‘ You are killing me with an icy death !’

The dead-cold touches lingered a moment longer—and left me.

The first sound came.

It was the sound of a whisper on my pillow, close to my ear. My strange insensibility to fear remained undisturbed. The whisper was welcome, it kept me company in the dark room.

It said to me : ‘Do you know who I am ?’

I answered : ‘No.’

It said : ‘Who have you been thinking of this evening ?’

I answered : ‘My mother.’

The whisper said : ‘I am your mother.’

‘Oh, mother, command the light to come back ! Show yourself to me !’

‘No.’

‘Why not ?’

‘My face was hidden when I passed from life to death. My face no mortal creature may see.’

‘Oh, mother, touch me ! Kiss me !’

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘My touch is poison. My kiss is death.’

The sense of fear began to come to me now. I moved my head away on the pillow. The whisper followed my movement.

‘Leave me,’ I said. ‘You are an Evil Spirit.’

The whisper answered : ‘I am your mother.’

‘You come to tempt me.’

‘I come to harden your heart. Daughter of mine, whose blood is cool; daughter of mine, who tamely submits—you have loved. Is it true?’

‘It is true.’

‘The man you loved has deserted you. Is it true?’

‘It is true.’

‘A woman has lured him away to herself. A woman has had no mercy on you, or on him. Is it true?’

‘It is true.’

‘If she lives, what crime towards you will she commit next?’

‘If she lives, she will marry him.’

‘Will you let her live?’

‘Never.’

‘Have I hardened your heart against her?’

‘Yes.’

‘Will you kill her?’

‘Show me how.’

There was a sudden silence. I was still left in the darkness; feeling nothing, hearing nothing. Even the consciousness that I was lying on my bed deserted me. I had no idea that I was in the bedroom; I had no knowledge of where I was.

The ghastly light that I had seen already dawned on me once more. I was no longer in my bed, no longer in my room, no longer in the house. Without wonder, without even a feeling of surprise, I looked round. The place

was familiar to me. I was alone in the Museum of our town.

The light flowed along in front of me. I followed, from room to room in the Museum, where the light led.

First, through the picture gallery, hung with the works of modern masters. Then, through the room filled with specimens of stuffed animals. The lion and the tiger, the vulture of the Alps and the great albatross, looked like living creatures threatening me, in the supernatural light. I entered the third room, devoted to the exhibition of ancient armour, and the weapons of all nations. Here the light rose higher, and, leaving me in darkness where I stood, showed a collection of swords, daggers, and knives arranged on the wall in imitation of the form of a star.

The whisper sounded again, close at my ear. It echoed my own thought, when I had called to mind the ways of killing which

history had taught me. It said: 'Kill her with the knife.'

No. My heart failed me when I thought of the blood. I hid the dreadful weapons from my view. I cried out: 'Let me go! let me go!'

Again, I was lost in darkness. Again, I had no knowledge in me of where I was. Again, after an interval, the light showed me the new place in which I stood.

I was alone in the burial ground of our parish church. The light led me on, among the graves, to the lonely corner in which the great yew tree stands ; and, rising higher, revealed the solemn foliage, brightened by the fatal red fruit which hides in itself the seeds of death.

The whisper tempted me again. It followed again the train of my own thought. It said : 'Kill her by poison.'

No. Revenge by poison steals its way to

its end. The base deceitfulness of Helena's crime against me seemed to call for a day of reckoning that hid itself under no disguise. I raised my cry to be delivered from the sight of the deadly tree. The changes which I have tried to describe, followed once more the confession of what I felt; the darkness was dispelled for the third time.

I was standing in Helena's room, looking at her as she lay asleep in her bed.

She was quite still now; but she must have been restless at some earlier time. The bed-clothes were disordered, her head had sunk so low, that the pillow rose high and vacant above her. There, coloured by a tender flush of sleep, was the face whose beauty put my poor face to shame. There, was the sister who had committed the worst of murders—the wretch who had killed in me all that made life worth having. While that thought was in my mind, I heard the whisper again. ‘Kill her

openly,' the tempting mother said. 'Kill her daringly. Faint heart, do you still want courage? Rouse your spirit; look! see yourself in the act!'

The temptation took a form which now tried me for the first time.

As if a mirror had reflected the scene, I saw myself standing by the bedside, with the pillow that was to smother the sleeper in my hands. I heard the whispering voice telling me how to speak the words that warned and condemned her: 'Wake! you who have taken him from me! Wake! and meet your doom.'

I saw her start up in the bed. The sudden movement disordered the nightdress over her bosom, and showed the miniature portrait of a man, hung round her neck.

The man was Philip. The likeness was looking at me.

So dear, so lovely—those eyes that had once been the light of my heart, mourned for

me and judged me now. They saw the guilty thoughts that polluted me ; they brought me to my knees, imploring him to help me back to my better self : ‘ One last mercy, dear, to comfort me under the loss of you. Let the love that was once my life, be my good angel still. Save me, Philip; even though you forsake me—save me from myself !’

* * * * *

There was a sudden cry.

The agony of it pierced my brain—drove away the ghastly light—silenced the tempting whispers. I came to myself. I saw—and not in a dream.

Helena *had* started up in her bed. That cry of terror, at the sight of me in her room at night, *had* burst from her lips. The miniature of Philip hung round her neck, a visible reality. Though my head was dizzy, though my heart was sinking, I had not lost my senses yet. All that the night lamp could

show me, I still saw ; and I heard the sound, faintly, when the door of the bed-chamber was opened. Alarmed by that piercing cry, my father came hurrying into the room.

Not a word passed between us three. The whispers that I had heard were wicked ; the thoughts that had been in my mind were vile. Had they left some poison in the air of the room, which killed the words on our lips ?

My father looked at Helena. With a trembling hand, she pointed to me. He put his arm round me, and held me up. I remember his leading me away—and I remember nothing more.

My last words are written. I lock up this journal of misery—never, I hope and pray, to open it again.

Second Period (*continued*).

*EVENTS IN THE FAMILY, RELATED BY THE
GOVERNOR.*

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MIDDLE-AGED LADY.

IN the year 1870, I found myself compelled to submit to the demands of two hard task-masters. Advancing age and failing health reminded the Governor of the Prison of his duty to his successor, in one unanswerable word—Resign.

When they have employed us and interested us, for the greater part of our lives, we bid farewell to our duties—even to the gloomy duties of a prison—with a sense of regret. My view of the future presented a vacant prospect indeed, when I looked at my idle life to come, and wondered what I should do with

it. Loose on the world—at my age!—I drifted into domestic refuge, under the care of my two dear and good sons. After a while (never mind how long a while) I began to grow restless under the heavy burden of idleness. Having nothing else to complain of, I complained of my health, and consulted a doctor. That sagacious man hit on the right way of getting rid of me—he recommended travelling.

This was unexpected advice. After some hesitation, I accepted it reluctantly.

The instincts of age recoil from making new acquaintances, contemplating new places, and adopting new habits. Besides, I hate railway travelling. However, I contrived to get as far as Italy, and stopped to rest at Florence. Here, I found pictures by the old masters that I could really enjoy, a public park that I could honestly admire, and an excellent friend and colleague of former days ;

once chaplain to the prison, now clergyman in charge of the English Church. We met in the gallery of the Pitti Palace; and he recognised me immediately. I was pleased to find that the lapse of years had made so little difference in my personal appearance.

The traveller who advances as far as Florence, and does not go on to Rome, must be regardless indeed of the opinions of his friends. Let me not attempt to conceal it—I am that insensible traveller. Over and over again, I said to myself: ‘Rome must be done;’ and over and over again, I put off doing it. To own the truth, the fascinations of Florence, aided by the society of my friend, laid so strong a hold on me that I believe I should have ended my days in the delightful Italian city, but for the dangerous illness of one of my sons. This misfortune hurried me back to England, in dread, every step of the way, of finding that I had arrived too late. The journey

(thank God) proved to have been taken without need. My son was no longer in danger, when I reached London in the year 1875.

At that date, I was near enough to the customary limit of human life to feel the necessity of rest and quiet. In other words, my days of travel had come to their end.

Having established myself in my own country, I did not forget to let old friends know where they might find me. Among those to whom I wrote was another colleague of past years, who still held his medical appointment in the prison. When I received the doctor's reply, it enclosed a letter directed to me at my old quarters in the Governor's rooms. Who could possibly have sent a letter to an address which I had left five years since? My correspondent proved to be no less a person than the Congregational Minister—the friend whom I had estranged from me

by the tone in which I had written to him, on the long-past occasion of his wife's death.

It was a distressing letter to read. I beg permission to give only the substance of it in this place.

Entreating me, with touching expressions of humility and sorrow, to forgive his long silence, the writer appealed to my friendly remembrance of him. He was in sore need of counsel, under serious difficulties ; and I was the only person to whom he could apply for help. In the disordered state of his health at that time, he ventured to hope that I would visit him at his present place of abode, and would let him have the happiness of seeing me as speedily as possible. He concluded with this extraordinary postscript :

‘ When you see my daughters, say nothing to either of them which relates, in any way, to the subject of their ages. You shall hear why when we meet.’

The reading of this letter naturally reminded me of the claims which my friend's noble conduct had established on my admiration and respect, at the past time when we met in the prison. I could not hesitate to grant his request—strangely as it was expressed, and doubtful as the prospect appeared to be of my answering the expectations which he had founded on the renewal of our intercourse. Answering his letter by telegraph, I promised to be with him on the next day.

On arriving at the station, I found that I was the only traveller, by a first-class carriage, who left the train. A young lady, remarkable by her good looks and good dressing, seemed to have noticed this trifling circumstance. She approached me with a ready smile. 'I believe I am speaking to my father's friend,' she said; 'my name is Helena Gracedieu.'

Here was one of the Minister's two 'daughters'; and that one of the two—as

I discovered the moment I shook hands with her—who was my friend's own child. Miss Helena recalled to me her mother's face, infinitely improved by youth and health, and by a natural beauty which that cruel and deceitful woman could never have possessed. The slanting forehead and the shifting flashing eyes, that I recollected in the parent, were reproduced (slightly reproduced, I ought to say) in the child. As for the other features, I had never seen a more beautiful nose and mouth, or a more delicately-shaped outline, than was presented by the lower part of the face. But Miss Helena somehow failed to charm me. I doubt if I should have fallen in love with her, even in the days when I was a foolish young man.

The first question that I put, as we drove from the station to the house, related naturally to her father.

‘He is very ill,’ she began; ‘I am afraid

you must prepare yourself to see a sad change. Nerves. The mischief first showed itself, the doctor tells us, in derangement of his nervous system. He has been, I regret to tell you, obstinate in refusing to give up his preaching and pastoral work. He ought to have tried rest at the seaside. Things have gone on from bad to worse. Last Sunday, at the beginning of his sermon, he broke down. Very, very sad—is it not ? The doctor says that precious time has been lost, and he must make up his mind to resign his charge. He won't hear of it. You are his old friend. Please try to persuade him.'

Fluently spoken ; the words well chosen ; the melodious voice reminding me of the late Mrs. Gracedieu's advantages in that respect ; little sighs judiciously thrown in here and there, just at the right places ; everything, let me own, that could present a dutiful daughter as a pattern of propriety—and nothing, let me

add, that could produce an impression on my insensible temperament. If I had not been too discreet to rush at a hasty conclusion, I might have been inclined to say : her mother's child, every inch of her !

The interest which I was still able to feel in my friend's domestic affairs centred in the daughter whom he had adopted.

In her infancy I had seen the child, and liked her ; I was the one person living (since the death of Mrs. Gracedieu) who knew how the Minister had concealed the sad secret of her parentage ; and I wanted to discover if the hereditary taint had begun to show itself in the innocent offspring of the murderess. Just as I was considering how I might harmlessly speak of Miss Helena's 'sister,' Miss Helena herself introduced the subject.

'May I ask,' she resumed, 'if you were disappointed when you found nobody but me to meet you at our station ?'

Here was an opportunity of paying her a compliment, if I had been a younger man, or if she had produced a favourable impression on me. As it was, I hit—if I may praise myself—on an ingenious compromise.

‘What excuse could I have,’ I asked, ‘for feeling disappointed?’

‘Well, I hear you are an official personage—I ought to say, perhaps, a retired official personage. We might have received you more respectfully, if *both* my father’s daughters had been present at the station. It’s not my fault that my sister was not with me.’

The tone in which she said this strengthened my prejudice against her. It told me that the two girls were living together on no very friendly terms; and it suggested—justly or unjustly I could not then decide—that Miss Helena was to blame.

‘Perhaps your sister is ill?’ I said.

‘My sister is away from home.’

‘ Surely, Miss Helena, that is a good reason for her not coming to meet me ?’

‘ I beg your pardon—it is a bad reason. She has been sent away for the recovery of her health—and the loss of her health is entirely her own fault.’

What did this matter to me ? I decided on dropping the subject. My memory reverted, however, to past occasions on which the loss of *my* health had been entirely my own fault. There was something in these personal recollections, which encouraged my perverse tendency to sympathize with a young lady to whom I had not yet been introduced. The young lady’s sister appeared to be discouraged by my silence. She said : ‘ I hope you don’t think the worse of me for what I have just mentioned ?’

‘ Certainly not.’

‘ Perhaps, you fail to see any need for my speaking of my sister at all ? Will you kindly listen, if I try to explain myself ?’

‘With pleasure.’

She slyly set the best construction on my perfectly commonplace reply.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘The fact is, my father (I can’t imagine why) wishes you to see my sister as well as me. He has written to the farmhouse at which she is now staying, to tell her to come home to-morrow. It is possible—if your kindness offers me an opportunity—that I may ask to be guided by your experience, in a little matter which interests me. My sister is rash, and reckless, and has a terrible temper. I should be very sorry indeed if you were induced to form an unfavourable opinion of me, from anything you might notice if you see us together. You understand me, I hope?’

‘I quite understand you.’

To set me against her sister, in her own private interests—there, as I felt sure, was the motive under which she was acting. As hard

as her mother, as selfish as her mother, and, judging from those two bad qualities, probably as cruel as her mother. That was how I understood Miss Helena⁷ Gracedieu, when our carriage drew up at her father's house.

A middle-aged lady was on the door-step, when we arrived, just ringing the bell. She looked round at us both ; being evidently as complete a stranger to my fair companion as she was to me. When the servant opened the door, she said :

‘ Is Miss Jillgall at home ?’

At the sound of that odd name, Miss Helena tossed her head disdainfully. She took no sort of notice of the stranger-lady who was at the door of her father's house. This young person's contempt for Miss Jillgall appeared to extend to Miss Jillgall's friends.

In the meantime, the servant's answer was :
‘ Not at home.’

The middle-aged lady said : ‘ Do you expect her back soon ?’

‘ Yes, ma’am.’

‘ I will call again, later in the day.’

‘ What name, if you please ?’

The lady stole another look at me, before she replied.

‘ Never mind the name,’ she said — and walked away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MINISTER'S MISFORTUNE.

‘Do you know that lady?’ Miss Helena asked, as we entered the house.

‘She is a perfect stranger to me,’ I answered.

‘Are you sure you have not forgotten her?’

‘Why do you think I have forgotten her?’

‘Because she evidently remembered you.’

The lady had no doubt looked at me twice. If this meant that my face was familiar to her, I could only repeat what I have already said. Never, to my knowledge, had I seen her before.

Leading the way upstairs, Miss Helena

apologised for taking me into her father's bedroom. 'He is able to sit up in an arm-chair,' she said; 'and he might do more, as I think, if he would exert himself. He won't exert himself. Very sad. Would you like to look at your room, before you see my father? It is quite ready for you. We hope'—she favoured me with a fascinating smile, devoted to winning my heart when her interests required it—'we hope you will pay us a long visit; we look on you as one of ourselves.'

I thanked her, and said I would shake hands with my old friend before I went to my room. We parted at the bedroom door.

It is out of my power to describe the shock that overpowered me when I first saw the Minister again, after the long interval of time that had separated us. Nothing that his daughter said, nothing that I myself anticipated, had prepared me for that lamentable change. For the moment, I was not suffi-

ciently master of myself to be able to speak to him. He added to my embarrassment by the humility of his manner, and the formal elaboration of his apologies.

‘I feel painfully that I have taken a liberty with you,’ he said, ‘after the long estrangement between us—for which my want of Christian forbearance is to blame. Forgive it, sir, and forget it. I hope to show that necessity justifies my presumption, in subjecting you to a wearisome journey for my sake.’

Beginning to recover myself, I begged that he would make no more excuses. My interruption seemed to confuse him.

‘I wished to say,’ he went on, ‘that you are the one man who can understand me. There is my only reason for asking to see you, and looking forward as I do to your advice. You remember the night—or was it the day?—before that miserable woman was hanged? You were the only person present when I

agreed to adopt the poor little creature, stained already (one may say) by its mother's infamy. I think your wisdom foresaw what a terrible responsibility I was undertaking ; you tried to prevent it. Well ! well ! you have been in my confidence—you only. Mind ! nobody in this house knows that one of the two girls is not really my daughter. Pray stop me, if you find me wandering from the point. My wish is to show that you are the only man I can open my heart to. She——' He paused, as if in search of a lost idea, and left the sentence uncompleted. ' Yes,' he went on, ' I was thinking of my adopted child. Did I ever tell you that I baptized her myself ? and by a good Scripture name too—Eunice. Ah, sir, that little helpless baby is a grown-up girl now ; of an age to inspire love, and to feel love. I blush to acknowledge it ; I have behaved with a want of self-control, with a cowardly weakness—. No ! I am, indeed,

wandering this time. I ought to have told you first that I have been brought face to face with the possibility of Eunice's marriage. And, to make it worse still, I can't help liking the young man. He comes of a good family—excellent manners, highly educated, plenty of money, a gentleman in every sense of the word. And poor little Eunice is so fond of him! Isn't it dreadful to be obliged to check her dearly-loved Philip? The young gentleman's name is Philip. Do you like the name? I say I am obliged to check her sweetheart in the rudest manner, when all he wants to do is to ask me modestly for my sweet Eunice's hand. Oh, what have I not suffered, without a word of sympathy to comfort me, before I had courage enough to write to you! Shall I make a dreadful confession? If my religious convictions had not stood in my way, I believe I should have committed suicide. Put yourself in my place. Try to see yourself shrink-

ing from a necessary explanation, when the happiness of a harmless girl—so dutiful, so affectionate—depended on a word of kindness from your lips. And that word you are afraid to speak ! Don't take offence, sir ; I mean myself, not you. Why don't you say something ?' he burst out fiercely, incapable of perceiving that he had allowed me no opportunity of speaking to him. 'Good God ! don't you understand me, after all ?'

The signs of mental confusion in his talk had so distressed me, that I had not been composed enough to feel sure of what he really meant, until he described himself as 'shrinking from a necessary explanation.' Hearing those words, my knowledge of the circumstances helped me ; I realised what his situation really was.

'Compose yourself,' I said, 'I understand you at last.'

He had suddenly become distrustful.

‘Prove it !’ he muttered, with a furtive look at me. ‘I want to be satisfied that you understand my position.’

‘This is your position,’ I told him. ‘You are placed between two deplorable alternatives. If you tell this young gentleman that Miss Eunice’s mother was a criminal hanged for murder, his family—even if he himself doesn’t recoil from it—will unquestionably forbid the marriage ; and your adopted daughter’s happiness will be the sacrifice.’

‘True !’ he said. ‘Frightfully true ! Go on.’

‘If, on the other hand, you sanction the marriage, and conceal the truth, you commit a deliberate act of deceit ; and you leave the lives of the young couple at the mercy of a possible discovery, which might part husband and wife—cast a slur on their children—and break up the household.’

He shuddered while he listened to me. ‘Come to the end of it,’ he cried.

I had no more to say, and I was obliged to answer him to that effect.

‘No more to say?’ he replied. ‘You have not told me yet what I most want to know.’

I did a rash thing; I asked what it was that he most wanted to know.

‘Can’t you see it for yourself?’ he demanded indignantly. ‘Suppose you were put between those two alternatives which you mentioned just now.’

‘Well?’

‘What would you do, sir, in my place? Would you own the disgraceful truth—before the marriage—or run the risk, and keep the horrid story to yourself?’

Either way, my reply might lead to serious consequences. I hesitated.

He threatened me with his poor feeble hand. It was only the anger of a moment; his humour changed to supplication. He reminded me piteously of bygone days: ‘You used to

be a kind-hearted man. Has age hardened you? Have you no pity left for your old friend? My poor heart is sadly in want of a word of wisdom, spoken kindly.'

Who could have resisted this? I took his hand: 'Be at ease, dear Minister. In your place I should run the risk, and keep that horrid story to myself.'

He sank back gently in his chair. 'Oh, the relief of it!' he said. 'How can I thank you as I ought for quieting my mind?'

I seized the opportunity of quieting his mind to good purpose by suggesting a change of subject. 'Let us have done with serious talk for the present,' I proposed. 'I have been an idle man for the last five years, and I want to tell you about my travels.'

His attention began to wander, he evidently felt no interest in my travels. 'Are you sure,' he asked anxiously, 'that we have said all we ought to say? No!' he cried, answering his

own question. 'I believe I have forgotten something—I am certain I have forgotten something. Perhaps I mentioned it in the letter I wrote to you. Have you got my letter?'

I showed it to him. He read the letter, and gave it back to me with a heavy sigh. 'Not there!' he said despairingly. 'Not there!'

'Is the lost remembrance connected with anybody in the house?' I asked, trying to help him. 'Does it relate, by any chance, to one of the young ladies?'

'You wonderful man! Nothing escapes you. Yes; the thing I have forgotten concerns one of the girls. Stop! Let me get at it by myself. Surely it relates to Helena?' He hesitated; his face clouded over with an expression of anxious thought. 'Yes; it relates to Helena,' he repeated—'but how?' His eyes filled with tears. 'I am ashamed of my weakness,' he said faintly. 'You don't know how dreadful it is to forget things in this way.'

The injury that his mind had sustained now assumed an aspect that was serious indeed. The subtle machinery which stimulates the memory, by means of the association of ideas, appeared to have lost its working power in the intellect of this unhappy man. I made the first suggestion that occurred to me, rather than add to his distress by remaining silent.

‘If we talk of your daughter,’ I said, ‘the merest accident—a word spoken at random by you or me—may be all your memory wants to rouse it.’

He agreed eagerly to this: ‘Yes! Yes! Let me begin. Helena met you, I think, at the station. Of course, I remember that; it only happened a few hours since. Well?’ he went on, with a change in his manner to parental pride, which it was pleasant to see, ‘did you think my daughter a fine girl? I hope Helena didn’t disappoint you?’

‘Quite the contrary.’ Having made that

necessary reply, I saw my way to keeping his mind occupied by a harmless subject. ‘It must, however, be owned,’ I went on, ‘that your daughter surprised me.’

‘In what way?’

‘When she mentioned her name. Who could have supposed that you—an inveterate enemy to the Roman Catholic Church—would have christened your daughter by the name of a Roman Catholic Saint?’

He listened to this with a smile. Had I happily blundered on some association which his mind was still able to pursue?

‘You happen to be wrong this time,’ he said pleasantly. ‘I never gave my girl the name of Helena; and, what is more, I never baptized her. You ought to know that. Years and years ago, I wrote to tell you that my poor wife had made me a proud and happy father. And surely I said that the child was born while she was on a visit to her brother’s

rectory. Do you remember the name of the place? I told you it was a remote little village, called—— Suppose we put *your* memory to a test? Can you remember the name?’ he asked, with a momentary appearance of triumph showing itself, poor fellow, in his face.

After the time that had elapsed, the name had slipped my memory. When I confessed this, he exulted over me, with an unalloyed pleasure which it was cheering to see.

‘*Your* memory is failing you now,’ he said. ‘The name is Long Lanes. And what do you think my wife did—this is so characteristic of her!—when I presented myself at her bedside. Instead of speaking of our own baby, she reminded me of the name that I had given to our adopted daughter when I baptized the child. “You chose the ugliest name that a girl can have,” she said. I begged her to remember that “Eunice” was a name in

Scripture. She persisted in spite of me.' (What firmness of character !) " I detest the name of Eunice !" she said ; " and now that I have a girl of my own, it's my turn to choose the name ; I claim it as my right." She was beginning to get excited ; I allowed her to have her own way, of course. " Only let me know," I said, " what the name is to be when you have thought of it." My dear sir, she had the name ready, without thinking about it : " My baby shall be called by the name that is sweetest in my ears, the name of my dear lost mother." We had—what shall I call it?—a slight difference of opinion when I heard that the name was to be Helena. I really could *not* reconcile it to my conscience to baptize a child of mine by the name of a Popish saint. My wife's brother set things right between us. A worthy good man ; he died not very long ago—I forget the date. Not to detain you any longer, the rector of Long

Lanes baptized our daughter. That is how she comes by her un-English name ; and so it happens that her birth is registered in a village which her father has never inhabited. I hope, sir, you think a little better of my memory now ?'

I was afraid to tell him what I really did think.

He was not fifty years old yet ; and he had just exhibited one of the sad symptoms which mark the broken memory of old age. Lead him back to the events of many years ago, and (as he had just proved to me) he could remember well and relate coherently. But let him attempt to recall circumstances which had only taken place a short time since, and forgetfulness and confusion presented the lamentable result, just as I have related it.

The effort that he had made, the agitation that he had undergone in talking to me, had confirmed my fears that he would overtask

his wasted strength. He lay back in his chair. 'Let us go on with our conversation,' he murmured. 'We haven't recovered what I had forgotten, yet.' His eyes closed, and opened again languidly. 'There was something I wanted to recall,' he resumed, 'and you were helping me.' His weak voice died away ; his weary eyes closed again. After waiting until there could be no doubt that he was resting peacefully in sleep, I left the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LIVELY OLD MAID.

A PERFECT stranger to the interior of the house (seeing that my experience began and ended with the minister's bedchamber), I descended the stairs, in the character of a guest in search of domestic information.

On my way down, I heard the door of a room on the ground floor opened, and a woman's voice below, speaking in a hurry : 'My dear, I have not a moment to spare ; my patients are waiting for me.' This was followed by a confidential communication, judging by the tone. 'Mind ! not a word about me to that old gentleman !' Her

patients were waiting for her—had I discovered a female doctor? And there was some old gentleman whom she was not willing to trust—surely I was not that much-injured man?

Reaching the hall just as the lady said her last words, I caught a glimpse of her face, and discovered the middle-aged stranger who had called on ‘Miss Jillgall,’ and had promised to repeat her visit. A second lady was at the door, with her back to me, taking leave of her friend. Having said good-bye, she turned round—and we confronted each other.

I found her to be a little person, wiry and active ; past the prime of life, and ugly enough to encourage prejudice, in persons who take a superficial view of their fellow-creatures. Looking impartially at the little sunken eyes which rested on me with a comical expression of embarrassment, I saw signs that said : There is some good here, under a disagreeable surface, if you can only find it.

She saluted me with a carefully-performed curtsy, and threw open the door of a room on the ground floor.

‘Pray walk in, sir, and permit me to introduce myself. I am Mr. Gracedieu’s cousin—Miss Jillgall. Proud indeed to make the acquaintance of a gentleman distinguished in the service of his country—or perhaps I ought to say, in the service of the Law. The Governor offers hospitality to prisoners. And who introduces prisoners to board and lodging with the Governor?—the Law. Beautiful weather for the time of the year, is it not? May I ask—have you seen your room?’

The embarrassment which I had already noticed had extended by this time to her voice and her manner. She was evidently trying to talk herself into a state of confidence. It seemed but too probable that I was indeed the person mentioned by her prudent friend at the door.

Having acknowledged that I had not seen my room yet, my politeness attempted to add that there was no hurry. The wiry little lady was of the contrary opinion ; she jumped out of her chair as if she had been shot out of it. ‘Pray let me make myself useful. The dream of my life is to make myself useful to others ; and to such a man as you—I consider myself honoured. Besides, I do enjoy running up and downstairs. This way, dear sir ; this way to your room.’

She skipped up the stairs, and stopped on the first landing. ‘Do you know, I am a timid person, though I may not look like it. Sometimes, curiosity gets the better of me—and then I grow bold. Did you notice a lady who was taking leave of me just now at the house door?’

I replied that I had seen the lady for a moment, but not for the first time. ‘Just as I arrived here from the station,’ I said, ‘I

found her paying a visit when you were not at home.'

'Yes—and do tell me one thing more.' My readiness in answering seemed to have inspired Miss Jillgall with confidence. I heard no more confessions of overpowering curiosity. 'Am I right,' she proceeded, 'in supposing that Miss Helena accompanied you, on your way here from the station?'

'Quite right.'

'Did she say anything particular, when she saw the lady asking for me at the door?'

'Miss Helena thought,' I said, 'that the lady recognised me as a person whom she had seen before.'

'And what did you think yourself?'

'I thought Miss Helena was wrong.'

'Very extraordinary!' With that remark Miss Jillgall dropped the subject. The meaning of her reiterated inquiries was now, as it

seemed to me, clear enough. She was eager to discover how I could have inspired the distrust of me, expressed in the caution addressed to her by her friend.

When we reached the upper floor, she paused before the Minister's room.

‘I believe many years have passed,’ she said, ‘since you last saw Mr. Gracedieu. I am afraid you have found him a sadly changed man? You won't be angry with me, I hope, for asking more questions? I owe Mr. Gracedieu a debt of gratitude which no devotion, on my part, can ever repay. You don't know what a favour I shall consider it, if you will tell me what you think of him. Did it seem to you that he was not quite himself? I don't mean in his looks, poor dear—I mean in his mind.’

There was true sorrow and sympathy in her face. I believe I should hardly have thought her ugly, if we had first met at that moment.

Thus far, she had only amused me. I began really to like Miss Jillgall now.

‘I must not conceal from you,’ I replied, ‘that the state of Mr. Gracedieu’s mind surprised and distressed me. But I ought also to tell you that I saw him perhaps at his worst. The subject on which he wished to speak with me would have agitated any man, in his state of health. He consulted me about his daughter’s marriage.’

Miss Jillgall suddenly turned pale.

‘His daughter’s marriage?’ she repeated. ‘Oh, you frighten me!’

‘Why should I frighten you?’

She seemed to find some difficulty in expressing herself. ‘I hardly know how to put it, sir. You will excuse me (won’t you?) if I say what I feel. You have influence—not the sort of influence that finds places for people who don’t deserve them, and gets mentioned in the newspapers—I only mean

influence over Mr. Gracedieu. That's what frightens me. How do I know——? Oh, dear, I'm asking another question! Allow me, for once, to be plain and positive. I'm afraid, sir, you have encouraged the Minister to consent to Helena's marriage.'

'Pardon me,' I answered, 'you mean Eunice's marriage.'

'No, sir! Helena.'

'No, Madam! Eunice.'

'What does he mean?' said Miss Jillgall to herself.

I heard her. 'This is what I mean,' I asserted, in my most positive manner. 'The only subject on which the Minister has consulted me is Miss Eunice's marriage.'

My tone left her no alternative but to believe me. She looked not only bewildered but alarmed. 'Oh, poor man, has he lost himself in such a dreadful way as that?' she said to herself. 'I daren't believe it.' She turned

to me. ‘ You have been talking with him for some time. Please try to remember. While Mr. Gracedieu was speaking of Euneece, did he say nothing of Helena’s infamous conduct to her sister ?’

Not the slightest hint of any such thing, I assured her, had reached my ears.

‘ Then,’ she cried, ‘ I can tell you what he has forgotten ! We kept as much of that miserable story to ourselves as we could, in mercy to him. Besides, he was always fondest of Euneece ; she would live in his memory when he had forgotten the other—the wretch, the traitress, the plotter, the fiend !’ Miss Jillgall’s good manners slipped, as it were, from under her ; she clenched her fists as a final means of expressing her sentiments. ‘ The wretched English language isn’t half strong enough for me,’ she declared with a look of fury.

I took a liberty. ‘ May I ask what Miss Helena has done ?’ I said.

‘*May* you ask ? Oh, Heavens ! you must ask, you shall ask. Mr. Governor, if your eyes are not opened to Helena’s true character, I can tell you what she will do ; she will deceive you into taking her part. Do you think she went to the station out of regard for the great man ? Pooh ! she went with an eye to her own interests ; and she means to make the great man useful. Thank God, I can stop that !’

She checked herself there, and looked suspiciously at the door of Mr. Gracedieu’s room.

‘In the interest of our conversation,’ she whispered, ‘we have not given a thought to the place we have been talking in. Do you think the Minister has heard us ?’

‘Not if he is asleep—as I left him.’

Miss Jillgall shook her head ominously. ‘The safe way is this way,’ she said. ‘Come with me.’

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FUTURE LOOKS GLOOMY.

My ever-helpful guide led me to my room—well out of Mr. Gracedieu's hearing, if he happened to be awake—at the other end of the passage. Having opened the door, she paused on the threshold. The decrees of that merciless English despot, Propriety, claimed her for their own. 'Oh, dear !' she said to herself, 'ought I to go in ?'

My interest as a man (and, what is more, an old man) in the coming disclosure, was too serious to be trifled with in this way. I took her arm, and led her into my room as if I was at a dinner-party, leading her to the

table. Is it the good or the evil fortune of mortals that the comic side of life, and the serious side of life, are perpetually in collision with each other? We burst out laughing, at a moment of grave importance to us both. Perfectly inappropriate, and perfectly natural. But we were neither of us philosophers, and we were ashamed of our own merriment the moment it had ceased.

‘When you hear what I have to tell you,’ Miss Jillgall began, ‘I hope you will think as I do. What has slipped Mr. Gracedieu’s memory, it may be safer to say—for he is sometimes irritable, poor dear—where he won’t know anything about it.’

With that she told the lamentable story of the desertion of Eunice.

In silence I listened, from first to last. How could I trust myself to speak, as I must have spoken, in the presence of a woman? The cruel injury inflicted on the poor girl,

who had interested and touched me in the first innocent year of her life—who had grown to womanhood to be the victim of two wretches, both trusted by her, both bound to her by the sacred debt of love—so fired my temper that I longed to be within reach of the man, with a horsewhip in my hand. Seeing in my face, as I suppose, what was passing in my mind, Miss Jillgall expressed sympathy and admiration in her own quaint way : ‘ Ah, I like to see you so angry ! It’s grand to know that a man who has governed prisoners has got such a pitying heart. Let me tell you one thing, sir. You will be more angry than ever, when you see my sweet girl to-morrow. And mind this — it is Helena’s devouring vanity, Helena’s wicked jealousy of her sister’s good fortune, that has done the mischief. Don’t be too hard on Philip ! I do believe, if the truth was told, he is ashamed of himself.’

I felt inclined to be harder on Philip than ever. 'Where is he?' I asked.

Miss Jillgall started. 'Oh, Mr. Governor, don't show the severe side of yourself, after the pretty compliment I have just paid to you! What a masterful voice! and what eyes, dear sir; what terrifying eyes! I feel as if I was one of your prisoners, and had misbehaved myself.'

I repeated my question with improvement, I hope, in my looks and tones: 'Don't think me obstinate, my dear lady. I only want to know if he is in this town.'

Miss Jillgall seemed to take a curious pleasure in disappointing me; she had not forgotten my unfortunate abruptness of look and manner. 'You won't find him here,' she said.

'Perhaps he has left England?'

'If you must know, sir, he is in London—with Mr. Dunboyne.'

The name startled me.

In a moment more it recalled to my memory a remarkable letter, addressed to me many years ago, which will be found in my introductory narrative. The writer—an Irish gentleman, named Dunboyne—confided to me that his marriage had associated him with the murderess, who had then been recently executed, as brother-in-law to that infamous woman. This circumstance he had naturally kept a secret from everyone, including his son, then a boy. I alone was made an exception to the general rule, because I alone could tell him what had become of the poor little girl, who in spite of the disgraceful end of her mother was still his niece. If the child had not been provided for, he felt it his duty to take charge of her education, and to watch over her prospects in the future. Such had been his object in writing to me; and such was the substance of his letter. I had merely informed him, in reply, that his kind inten-

tions had been anticipated, and that the child's prosperous future was assured.

Miss Jillgall's keen observation noticed the impression that had been produced upon me. 'Mr. Dunboyne's name seems to surprise you,' she said.

'This is the first time I have heard you mention it,' I answered.

She looked as if she could hardly believe me. 'Surely you must have heard the name,' she said, 'when I told you about poor Euneece?'

'No.'

'Well, then, Mr. Gracedieu must have mentioned it?'

'No.'

This second reply in the negative irritated her.

'At any rate,' she said sharply, 'you appeared to know Mr. Dunboyne's name, just now.'

‘Certainly!’

‘And yet,’ she persisted, ‘the name seemed to come upon you as a surprise. I don’t understand it. If I have mentioned Philip’s name once, I have mentioned it a dozen times.’

We were completely at cross-purposes. She had taken something for granted which was an unfathomable mystery to me.

‘Well,’ I objected, ‘if you did mention his name a dozen times—excuse me for asking the question—what then?’

‘Good Heavens!’ cried Miss Jillgall, ‘do you mean to say you never guessed that Philip was Mr. Dunboyne’s son?’

I was petrified.

His son! Dunboyne’s son! How could I have guessed it?

At a later time only, the good little creature who had so innocently deceived me, remembered that the mischief might have been wrought by the force of habit. While he had

still a claim on their regard, the family had always spoken of Eunice's unworthy lover by his Christian name; and what had been familiar in their mouths felt the influence of custom, before time enough had elapsed to make them think as readily of the enemy as they had hitherto thought of the friend.

But I was ignorant of this: and the disclosure by which I found myself suddenly confronted was more than I could support. For the moment, speech was beyond me.

His son! Dunboyne's son!

What a position that young man had occupied, unsuspected by his father, unknown to himself! Kept in ignorance of the family disgrace, he had been a guest in the house of the man who had consoled his infamous aunt on the eve of her execution—who had saved his unhappy cousin from poverty, from sorrow, from shame. And but one human being knew this. And that human being was myself!

Observing my agitation, Miss Jillgall placed her own construction on it.

‘Do you know anything bad of Philip?’ she asked eagerly. ‘If it’s something that will prevent Helena from marrying him, tell me what it is, I beg and pray.’

I knew no more of ‘Philip’ (whom she still called by his Christian name!) than she had told me herself: there was no help for it but to disappoint her. At the same time I was unable to conceal that I was ill at ease, and that it might be well to leave me by myself. After a look round the bedchamber to see that nothing was wanting to my comfort, she made her quaint curtsy, and left me with her own inimitable form of farewell.

‘Oh, indeed, I have been here too long! And I’m afraid I have been guilty, once or twice, of vulgar familiarity. You will excuse me, I hope. This has been an exciting interview—I think I am going to cry.’

She ran out of the room ; and carried away with her some of my kindest feelings, short as the time of our acquaintance had been. What a wife and what a mother was lost there—and all for want of a pretty face!

Left alone, my thoughts inevitably reverted to Dunboyne the elder, and to all that had happened in Mr. Gracedieu's family since the Irish gentleman had written to me in bygone years.

The terrible choice of responsibilities which had preyed on the Minister's mind had been foreseen by Mr. Dunboyne, when he first thought of adopting his infant niece, and had warned him to dread what might happen in the future, if he brought her up as a member of the family with his own boy, and if the two young people became at a later period attached to each other. How had the wise foresight, which offered such a contrast to the poor Minister's impulsive act of mercy, met with its

reward? Fate or Providence (call it which we may) had brought Dunboyne's son and the daughter of the murderess together; had inspired those two strangers with love; and had emboldened them to plight their troth by a marriage engagement. Was the man's betrayal of the trust placed in him by the faithful girl, to be esteemed a fortunate circumstance by the two persons who knew the true story of her parentage, the Minister and myself? Could we rejoice in an act of infidelity which had embittered and darkened the gentle harmless life of the victim? Or could we, on the other hand, encourage the ruthless deceit, the hateful treachery, which had put the wicked Helena—with no exposure to dread if *she* married—into her wronged sister's place? Impossible! In the one case as in the other, impossible!

Equally hopeless did the prospect appear, when I tried to determine what my own individual course of action ought to be.

In my calmer moments, the idea had occurred to my mind of going to Dunboyne the younger, and, if he had any sense of shame left, exerting my influence to lead him back to his betrothed wife. How could I now do this, consistently with my duty to the young man's father; knowing what I knew, and not forgetting that I had myself advised Mr. Gracedieu to keep the truth concealed, when I was equally ignorant of Philip Dunboyne's parentage and of Helena Gracedieu's treachery?

Even if events so ordered it that the marriage of Eunice might yet take place—without any interference exerted to produce that result, one way or the other, on my part—it would be just as impossible for me to speak out now, as it had been in the long-past years when I had so cautiously answered Mr. Dunboyne's letter. But what would he think of me if accident led, sooner or later, to the disclosure which I had felt bound to

conceal? The more I tried to forecast the chances of the future, the darker and the darker was the view that faced me.

To my sinking heart and wearied mind, good Dame Nature presented a more acceptable prospect, when I happened to look out of the window of my room. There I saw the trees and flower-beds of a garden, tempting me irresistibly under the cloudless sunshine of a fine day. I was on my way out, to recover heart and hope, when a knock at the door stopped me.

Had Miss Jillgall returned? When I said ‘Come in,’ Mr. Gracedieu opened the door, and entered the room.

He was so weak that he staggered as he approached me. Leading him to a chair, I noticed a wild look in his eyes, and a flush on his haggard cheeks. Something had happened.

‘When you were with me in my room,’ he

began, 'did I not tell you that I had forgotten something?'

'Certainly you did.'

'Well, I have found the lost remembrance. My misfortune—I ought to call it the punishment for my sins, is recalled to me now. The worst curse that can fall on a father is the curse that has come to me. I have a wicked daughter. My own child, sir! my own child!'

Had he been awake, while Miss Jillgall and I had been talking outside his door? Had he heard her ask me if Mr. Gracedieu had said nothing of Helena's infamous conduct to her sister, while he was speaking of Eunice? The way to the lost remembrance had perhaps been found there. In any case, after that bitter allusion to his 'wicked daughter' some result must follow. Helena Gracedieu and a day of reckoning might be nearer to each other already than I had ventured to hope.

I waited anxiously for what he might say to me next.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WANDERING MIND.

FOR the moment, the Minister disappointed me.

Without speaking, without even looking up, he took out his pocket-book, and began to write in it. Constantly interrupted—either by a trembling in the hand that held the pencil, or by a difficulty (as I imagined) in expressing thoughts imperfectly realised—his patience gave way; he dashed the book on the floor.

‘My mind is gone!’ he burst out. ‘Oh, Father in Heaven, let death deliver me from a body without a mind!’

Who could hear him, and be guilty of the cruelty of preaching self-control? I picked up the pocket-book, and offered to help him.

‘Do you think you can?’ he asked.

‘I can at least try.’

‘Good fellow! What should I do without you? See now; here is my difficulty. I have got so many things to say, I want to separate them—or else they will all run into each other. Look at the book,’ my poor friend said mournfully; ‘they have run into each other in spite of me.’

The entries proved to be nearly incomprehensible. Here and there I discovered some scattered words, which showed themselves more or less distinctly in the midst of the surrounding confusion. The first word that I could make out was ‘Education.’ Helped by that hint, I trusted to guess-work to guide me in speaking to him. It was necessary to be

positive, or he would have lost all faith in me.

‘Well?’ he said impatiently.

‘Well,’ I answered, ‘you have something to say to me about the education which you have given to your daughters.’

‘Don’t put them together!’ he cried. ‘Dear, patient, sweet Eunice must not be confounded with that she-devil——’

‘Hush, hush, Mr. Gracedieu! Badly as Miss Helena has behaved, she is your own child.’

‘I repudiate her, sir! Think for a moment of what she has done--and then think of the religious education that I have given her. Heartless! Deceitful! The most ignorant creature in the lowest dens of this town could have done nothing more basely cruel. And this, after years on years of patient Christian instruction on my part! What is religion? What is education? I read a horrible book

once (I forget who was the author); it called religion superstition, and education empty form. I don't know; upon my word I don't know that the book may not—Oh, my tongue! Why don't I keep a guard over my tongue? Are you a father, too? Don't interrupt me. Put yourself in my place, and think of it. Heartless, deceitful, and *my* daughter. Give me the pocket-book; I want to see which memorandum comes first.'

He had now wrought himself into a state of excitement, which relieved his spirits of the depression that had weighed on them up to this time. His harmless vanity, always, as I suspect, a latent quality in his kindly nature, had already restored his confidence. With a self-sufficient smile, he consulted his own unintelligible entries, and made his own wild discoveries.

'Ah, yes; "M" stands for Minister; I come first. Am I to blame? Am I—

God forgive me my many sins—am I heartless? Am I deceitful?’

‘My good friend, not even your enemies could say that!’

‘Thank you. Who comes next?’ He consulted the book again. ‘Her mother, her sainted mother, comes next. People say she is like her mother. Was my wife heartless? Was the angel of my life deceitful?’

(‘That,’ I thought to myself, ‘is exactly what your wife was—and exactly what reappears in your wife’s child.’)

‘Where does her wickedness come from?’ he went on. ‘Not from her mother; not from me; not from a neglected education.’ He suddenly stepped up to me, and laid his hands on my shoulders; his voice dropped to hoarse, moaning, awe-struck tones. ‘Shall I tell you what it is? A possession of the devil.’

It was so evidently desirable to prevent any continuation of such a train of thought as

this, that I could feel no hesitation in interrupting him.

‘Will you hear what I have to say?’ I asked bluntly.

His humour changed again ; he made me a low bow, and went back to his chair. ‘I will hear you with pleasure,’ he answered politely. ‘You are the most eloquent man I know, with one exception—myself. Of course—myself.’

‘It is mere waste of time,’ I continued, ‘to regret the excellent education which your daughter has misused.’ Making that reply, I was tempted to add another word of truth. All education is at the mercy of two powerful counter-influences : the influence of temperament, and the influence of circumstances. But this was philosophy. How could I expect him to submit to philosophy ? ‘What we know of Miss Helena,’ I went on, ‘must be enough for us. She has plotted, and she means to succeed. Stop her.’

‘Just my idea!’ he declared firmly. ‘I refuse my consent to that abominable marriage.’

In the popular phrase, I struck while the iron was hot. ‘You must do more than that, sir,’ I told him.

His vanity suddenly took the alarm—I was leading him rather too undisguisedly. He handed his book back to me. ‘You will find,’ he said loftily, ‘that I have put it all down there.’

I pretended to find it, and read an imaginary entry to this effect: ‘After what she has already done, Helena is capable of marrying in defiance of my wishes and commands. This must be considered, and provided against.’ So far, I had succeeded in flattering him. But when (thinking of his paternal authority) I alluded next to his daughter’s age, his eyes rested on me with a look of downright terror.

‘No more of that!’ he said. ‘I won’t talk of the girls’ ages even with you.’

What did he mean ? It was useless to ask. I went on with the matter in hand—still deliberately speaking to him, as I might have spoken to a man with an intellect as clear as my own. In my experience, this practice generally stimulates a weak intelligence to do its best. We all know how children receive talk that is lowered, or books that are lowered, to their presumed level.

‘I shall take it for granted,’ I continued, ‘that Miss Helena is still under your lawful authority. She can only arrive at her ends by means of a runaway marriage. In that case, much depends on the man. You told me you couldn’t help liking him. This was, of course, before you knew of the infamous manner in which he has behaved. You must have changed your opinion now.’

He seemed to be at a loss how to reply. ‘I am afraid,’ he said, ‘the young man was drawn into it by Helena.’

Here was Miss Jillgall's apology for Philip Dunboyne repeated in other words. Despising and detesting the fellow as I did, I was forced to admit to myself that he must be recommended by personal attractions which it would be necessary to reckon with. I tried to get some more information from Mr. Gracedieu.

‘The excuse you have just made for him,’ I resumed, ‘implies that he is a weak man ; easily persuaded, easily led.’

The Minister answered by nodding his head.

‘Such weakness as that,’ I persisted, ‘is a vice in itself. It has led already, sir, to the saddest results.’

He admitted this by another nod.

‘I don't wish to shock you, Mr. Gracedieu ; but I must recommend employing the means that present themselves. You must practise on this man's weakness, for the sake of the good that may come of it. I hear he is in

London with his father. Try the strong influence, and write to his father. There is another reason besides for doing this. It is quite possible that the truth has been concealed from Mr. Dunboyne the elder. Take care that he is informed of what has really happened. Are you looking for pen, ink, and paper? Let me offer you the writing materials which I use in travelling.'

I placed them before him. He took up the pen; he arranged the paper; he was eager to begin.

After writing a few words, he stopped—reflected—tried again—stopped again—tore up the little that he had done—and began a new letter, ending in the same miserable result. It was impossible to witness his helplessness, to see how pitifully patient he was over his own incapacity, and to let the melancholy spectacle go on. I proposed to write the letter; authenticating it, of course, by his sig-

nature. When he allowed me to take the pen, he turned away his face, ashamed to let me see what he suffered. Was this the same man, whose great nature had so nobly asserted itself in the condemned cell? Poor mortality!

The letter was easily written.

I had only to inform Mr. Dunbcyne of his son's conduct; repeating, in the plainest language that I could use, what Miss Jillgall had related to me. Arrived at the conclusion, I contrived to make Mr. Gracedieu express himself in these strong terms: 'I protest against the marriage in justice to you, sir, as well as to myself. We can neither of us consent to be accomplices in an act of domestic treason of the basest kind.'

In silence, the Minister read the letter, and attached his signature to it. In silence, he rose and took my arm. I asked if he wished to go to his room. He only replied by a

sign. I offered to sit with him, and try to cheer him. Gratefully, he pressed my hand : gently, he put me back from the door. Crushed by the miserable discovery of the decay of his own faculties ! What could I do ? what could I say ? Nothing !

Miss Jillgall was in the drawing-room. With the necessary explanations, I showed her the letter. She read it with breathless interest. ‘It terrifies one to think how much depends on old Mr. Dunboyne,’ she said. ‘You know him. What sort of man is he?’

I could only assure her (after what I remembered of his letter to me) that he was a man whom we could depend upon.

Miss Jillgall possessed treasures of information to which I could lay no claim. Mr. Dunboyne, she told me, was a scholar, and a writer, and a rich man. His views on marriage were liberal in the extreme. Let

his son find good principles, good temper, and good looks, in a wife, and he would promise to find the money.

‘I get these particulars,’ said Miss Jillgall, ‘from dear Eunece. They are surely encouraging?’ That Helena may carry out Mr. Dunboyne’s views in her personal appearance is, I regret to say, what I can’t deny. But as to the other qualifications, how hopeful is the prospect! Good principles, and good temper? Ha! ha! Helena has the principles of Jezebel, and the temper of Lady Macbeth.’

After dashing off this striking sketch of character, the fair artist asked to look at my letter again, and observed that the address was wanting. ‘I can set this right for you,’ she resumed, ‘thanks, as before, to my sweet Eunece. And (don’t be in a hurry) I can make myself useful in another way. Oh, how I do enjoy making myself useful! If you trust your letter to the basket in the hall,

Helena's lovely eyes—capable of the meanest conceivable actions—are sure to take a peep at the address. In that case, do you think your letter would get to London? I am afraid you detect a faint infusion of spitefulness in that question. Oh, for shame! I'll post the letter myself.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SHAMELESS SISTER.

FOR some reason, which my unassisted penetration was unable to discover, Miss Helena Gracedieu kept out of my way.

At dinner, on the day of my arrival, and at breakfast on the next morning, she was present of course ; ready to make herself agreeable in a modest way, and provided with the necessary supply of cheerful small-talk. But the meal having come to an end, she had her domestic excuse ready, and unostentatiously disappeared like a well-bred young lady. I never met her on the stairs, never found myself intruding on her in the drawing-room, never caught her

getting out of my way in the garden. As much at a loss for an explanation of these mysteries as I was, Miss Jillgall's interest in my welfare led her to caution me in a vague and general way.

‘Take my word for it, dear Mr. Governor, she has some design on you. Will you allow an insignificant old maid to offer a suggestion? Oh, thank you; I will venture to advise. Please look back at your experience of the very worst female prisoner you ever had to deal with—and be guided accordingly if Helena catches you at a private interview.’

In less than half an hour afterwards, Helena caught me. I was writing in my room, when the maidservant came in with a message: ‘Miss Helena's compliments, sir, and would you please spare her half an hour, down-stairs?’

My first excuse was of course that I was engaged. This was disposed of by a second

message, provided beforehand, no doubt, for an anticipated refusal : ‘Miss Helena wished me to say, sir, that her time is your time.’ I was still obstinate ; I pleaded next that my day was filled up. A third message had evidently been prepared, even for this emergency : ‘Miss Helena will regret, sir, having the pleasure deferred, but she will leave you to make your own appointment for to-morrow.’ Persistency so inveterate as this led to a result which Mr. Gracedieu’s cautious daughter had not perhaps contemplated : it put me on my guard. There seemed to be a chance, to say the least of it, that I might serve Eunice’s interests if I discovered what the enemy had to say. I locked up my writing—declared myself incapable of putting Miss Helena to needless inconvenience—and followed the maid to the lower floor of the house.

The room to which I was conducted proved to be empty. I looked round me.

If I had been told that a man lived there who was absolutely indifferent to appearances, I should have concluded that his views were faithfully represented by his place of abode. The chairs and tables reminded me of a railway waiting-room. The shabby little book-case was the mute record of a life indifferent to literature. The carpet was of that dreadful drab colour, still the cherished favourite of the average English mind, in spite of every protest that can be entered against it, on behalf of Art. The ceiling, recently white-washed, made my eyes ache when they looked at it. On either side of the window, flaccid green curtains hung helplessly with nothing to loop them up. The writing-desk and the paper-case, viewed as specimens of woodwork, recalled the ready-made bedrooms on show in cheap shops. The books, mostly in slate-coloured bindings, were devoted to the literature which is called religious ; I only discovered

three worldly publications among them—Domestic Cookery, Etiquette for Ladies, and Hints on the Breeding of Poultry. An ugly little clock, ticking noisily in a black case, and two candlesticks of base metal placed on either side of it, completed the ornaments on the chimney-piece. Neither pictures nor prints hid the barrenness of the walls. I saw no needlework and no flowers. The one object in the place which showed any pretensions to beauty was a looking-glass in an elegant gilt frame—sacred to vanity, and worthy of the office that it filled. Such was Helena Gracedieu's sitting-room. I really could not help thinking : How like her !

She came in with a face perfectly adapted to the circumstances—pleased and smiling ; amiably deferential, in consideration of the claims of her father's guest—and, to my surprise, in some degree suggestive of one of those incorrigible female prisoners, to whom

Miss Jillgall had referred me when she offered a word of advice.

‘How kind of you to come so soon! Excuse my receiving you in my housekeeping-room; we shall not be interrupted here. Very plainly furnished, is it not? I dislike ostentation and display. Ornaments are out of place in a room devoted to domestic necessities. I hate domestic necessities. You notice the looking-glass? It’s a present. I should never have put such a thing up. Perhaps my vanity excuses it.’

She pointed the last remark by a look at herself in the glass; using it, while she despised it. Yes: there was a handsome face, paying her its reflected compliment—but not so well matched as it might have been by a handsome figure. Her feet were too large; her shoulders were too high; the graceful undulations of a well-made girl were absent when she walked; and her bosom was, to my

mind, unduly developed for her time of life.

She sat down by me with her back to the light. Happening to be opposite to the window, I offered her the advantage of a clear view of my face. She waited for me, and I waited for her—and there was an awkward pause before we spoke. She set the example.

‘Isn’t it curious?’ she remarked. ‘When two people have something particular to say to each other, and nothing to hinder them, they never seem to know how to say it. You are the oldest, sir. Why don’t you begin?’

‘Because I have nothing particular to say.’

‘In plain words, you mean that I must begin?’

‘If you please.’

‘Very well. I want to know whether I have given you (and Miss Jillgall, of course)

as much time as you want, and as many opportunities as you could desire ?’

‘ Pray go on, Miss Helena.’

‘ Have I not said enough already ?’

‘ Not enough, I regret to say, to convey your meaning to me.’

She drew her chair a little farther away from me. ‘ I am sadly disappointed,’ she said. ‘ I had such a high opinion of your perfect candour. I thought to myself, There is such a striking expression of frankness in his face. Another illusion gone ! I hope you won’t think I am offended, if I say a bold word. I am only a young girl, to be sure ; but I am not quite such a fool as you take me for. Do you really think I don’t know that Miss Jillgall has been telling you everything that is bad about me ; putting every mistake that I have made, every fault that I have committed, in the worst possible point of view ? And you have listened to her—quite naturally !

And you are prejudiced, strongly prejudiced, against me—what else could you be, under the circumstances? I don't complain ; I have purposely kept out of your way, and out of Miss Jillgall's way ; in short, I have afforded you every facility, as the prospectuses say. I only want to know if my turn has come at last. Once more, have I given you time enough, and opportunities enough ?'

'A great deal more than enough.'

'Do you mean that you have made up your mind about me without stopping to think ?'

'That is exactly what I mean. An act of treachery, Miss Helena, *is* an act of treachery ; no honest person need hesitate to condemn it. I am sorry you sent for me.'

I got up to go. With an ironical gesture of remonstrance, she signed to me to sit down again.

'Must I remind you, dear sir, of our famous

native virtue? Fair play is surely due to a young person who has nobody to take her part. You talked of treachery, just now. I deny the treachery. Please give me a hearing.'

I returned to my chair.

'Or would you prefer waiting,' she went on, 'till my sister comes here later in the day, and continues what Miss Jillgall has begun, with the great advantage of being young and nice-looking?'

When the female mind gets into this state, no wise man answers the female questions.

'Am I to take silence as meaning Go on?' Miss Helena inquired.

I begged her to interpret my silence in the sense most agreeable to herself.

This naturally encouraged her. She made a proposal: 'Do you mind changing places, sir?'

'Just as you like, Miss Helena.'

We changed chairs ; the light now fell full on her face. Had she deliberately challenged me to look into her secret mind if I could ? Anything like the stark insensibility of that young girl to every refinement of feeling, to every becoming doubt of herself, to every customary timidity of her age and sex in the presence of a man who had not disguised his unfavourable opinion of her, I never met with in all my experience of the world and of women.

‘ I wish to be quite mistress of myself,’ she explained ; ‘ your face, for some reason which I really don’t know, irritates me. The fact is, I have great pride in keeping my temper. Please make allowances. Now about Miss Jillgall. I suppose she told you how my sister first met with Philip Dunboyne ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ She also mentioned, perhaps, that he was a highly-cultivated man ?’

‘She did.’

‘Now we shall get on. When Philip came to our town here, and saw me for the first time—Do you object to my speaking familiarly of him, by his Christian name?’

‘In the case of anyone else in your position, Miss Helena, I should venture to call it bad taste.’

I was provoked into saying that. It failed entirely as a well-meant effort in the way of implied reproof. Miss Helena smiled.

‘You grant me a liberty which you would not concede to another girl.’ That was how she viewed it. ‘We are getting on better already. To return to what I was saying. When Philip first saw me—I have it from himself, mind—he felt that I should have been his choice, if he had met with me before he met with my sister. Do you blame him?’

‘If you will take my advice,’ I said, ‘you

will not inquire too closely into my opinion of Mr. Philip Dunboyne.'

'Perhaps you don't wish me to say any more?' she suggested.

'On the contrary; pray go on, if you like.'

After that concession, she was amiability itself. 'Oh, yes,' she assured me, 'that's easily done.' And she went on accordingly 'Philip having informed me of the state of his affections, I naturally followed his example. In fact, we exchanged confessions. Our marriage engagement followed as a matter of course. Do you blame me?'

'I will wait till you have done.'

'I have no more to say.'

She made that amazing reply with such perfect composure, that I began to fear there must have been some misunderstanding between us. 'Is that really all you have to say for yourself?' I persisted.

Her patience with me was most exemplary.

She lowered herself to my level. Not trusting to words only on this occasion, she (so to say) beat her meaning into my head by gesticulating on her fingers, as if she was educating a child.

‘Philip and I,’ she began, ‘are the victims of an accident, which kept us apart when we ought to have met together—we are not responsible for an accident.’ She impressed this on me by touching her forefinger. ‘Philip and I fell in love with each other at first sight—we are not responsible for the feelings implanted in our natures by an all-wise Providence.’ She assisted me in understanding this by touching her middle finger. ‘Philip and I owe a duty to each other, and accept a responsibility under those circumstances—the responsibility of getting married.’ A touch on her third finger, and an indulgent bow, announced that the lesson was ended. ‘I am not a clever man like you,’ she modestly

acknowledged, 'but I ask you to help us, when you next see my father, with some confidence. You know exactly what to say to him, by this time. Nothing has been forgotten.'

'Pardon me,' I said, 'a person has been forgotten.'

'Indeed? What person?'

'Your sister.'

A little perplexed at first, Miss Helena reflected, and recovered herself.

'Ah, yes,' she said; 'I was afraid I might be obliged to trouble you for an explanation—I see it now. You are shocked (very properly) when feelings of enmity exist between near relations; and you wish to be assured that I bear no malice towards Eunice. She is violent, she is sulky, she is stupid, she is selfish; and she cruelly refuses to live in the same house with me. Make your mind easy, sir, I forgive my sister.'

Let me not attempt to disguise it—Miss Helena Gracedieu confounded me.

Ordinary audacity is one of those forms of insolence which mature experience dismisses with contempt. This girl's audacity struck down all resistance, for one shocking reason: it was unquestionably sincere. Strong conviction of her own virtue stared at me in her proud and daring eyes. At that time, I was not aware of what I have learned since. The horrid hardening of her moral sense had been accomplished by herself. In her diary, there has been found the confession of a secret course of reading—with supplementary reflections flowing from it, which need only to be described as worthy of their source.

A person capable of repentance and reform would, in her place, have seen that she had disgusted me. Not a suspicion of this occurred to Miss Helena. 'I see you are embarrassed,' she remarked, 'and I am at no loss to account

for it. You are too polite to acknowledge that I have not made a friend of you yet. Oh, I mean to do it !'

'No,' I said, 'I think not.'

'We shall see,' she replied. 'Sooner or later, you will find yourself saying a kind word to my father for Philip and me.' She rose, and took a turn in the room—and stopped, eyeing me attentively. 'Are you thinking of Eunice ?' she asked.

'Yes.'

'She has your sympathy, I suppose ?'

'My heart-felt sympathy.'

'I needn't ask how I stand in your estimation, after that. Pray express yourself freely. Your looks confess it—you view me with a feeling of aversion.'

'I view you with a feeling of horror.'

The exasperating influences of her language, her looks, and her tones would, as I venture to think, have got to the end of another man's

self-control before this. Any way, she had at last irritated me into speaking as strongly as I felt. What I said had been so plainly (perhaps so rudely) expressed, that misinterpretation of it seemed to be impossible. She mistook me, nevertheless. The most merciless disclosure of the dreary side of human destiny is surely to be found in the failure of words, spoken or written, so to answer their purpose that we can trust them, in our attempts to communicate with each other. Even when he seems to be connected, by the nearest and dearest relations, with his fellow-mortals, what a solitary creature, tried by the test of sympathy, the human being really is in the teeming world that he inhabits! Affording one more example of the impotence of human language to speak for itself, my misinterpreted words had found their way to the one sensitive place in Helena Gracedieu's impenetrable nature. She betrayed it in the quivering and

flushing of her hard face, and in the appeal to the looking-glass which escaped her eyes the next moment. My hasty reply had roused the idea of a covert insult addressed to her handsome face. In other words, I had wounded her vanity. Driven by resentment, out came the secret distrust of me which had been lurking in that cold heart, from the moment when we first met.

‘I inspire you with horror, and Eunice inspires you with compassion,’ she said. ‘That, Mr. Governor, is not natural.’

‘May I ask why?’

‘You know why.’

‘No.’

‘You will have it?’

‘I want an explanation, Miss Helena, if that is what you mean.’

‘Take your explanation, then! You are not the stranger you are said to be to my sister and to me. Your interest in Eunice is

a personal interest of some kind. I don't pretend to guess what it is. As for myself, it is plain that somebody else has been setting you against me, before Miss Jillgall got possession of your private ear.'

In alluding to Eunice, she had blundered, strangely enough, on something like the truth. But when she spoke of herself, the headlong malignity of her suspicions—making every allowance for the anger that had hurried her into them—seemed to call for some little protest against a false assertion. I told her that she was completely mistaken.

'I am completely right,' she answered; 'I saw it.'

'Saw what?'

'Saw you pretending to be a stranger to me.'

'When did I do that?'

'You did it when we met at the station.'

The reply was too ridiculous for the preservation of any control over my own sense

of humour. It was wrong ; but it was inevitable—I laughed. She looked at me with a fury, revealing a concentration of evil passion in her which I had not seen yet. I asked her pardon ; I begged her to think a little before she persisted in taking a view of my conduct unworthy of her, and unjust to myself.

‘Unjust to You!’ she burst out. ‘Who are You ? A man who has driven your trade has spies always at his command—yes! and knows how to use them. You were primed with private information—you had, for all I know, a stolen photograph of me in your pocket—before ever you came to our town. Do you still deny it ? Oh, sir, why degrade yourself by telling a lie ?’

No such outrage as this had ever been inflicted on me, at any time in my life. My forbearance must, I suppose, have been more severely tried than I was aware of myself. With or without excuse for me, I was weak

enough to let a girl's spiteful tongue sting me, and, worse still, to let her see that I felt it.

‘You shall have no second opportunity, Miss Gracedieu, of insulting me.’ With that foolish reply, I opened the door violently, and went out.

She ran after me, triumphing in having roused the temper of a man old enough to have been her grandfather, and caught me by the arm. ‘Your own conduct has exposed you.’ (That was literally how she expressed herself.) ‘I saw it in your eyes when we met at the station. You, the stranger—you who allowed poor ignorant me to introduce myself—you knew me all the time, knew me by sight!’

I shook her hand off with an inconsiderate roughness, humiliating to remember. ‘It’s false!’ I cried. ‘I knew you by your likeness to your mother.’

The moment the words had passed my lips,

I came to my senses again ; I remembered what fatal words they might prove to be, if they reached the Minister's ears.

Heard only by his daughter, my reply seemed to cool the heat of her anger in an instant.

‘So you knew my mother?’ she said. ‘My father never told us that, when he spoke of your being such a very old friend of his. Strange, to say the least of it.’

I was wise enough—now when wisdom had come too late—not to attempt to explain myself, and not to give her an opportunity of saying more. ‘We are neither of us in a state of mind,’ I answered, ‘to allow this interview to continue. I must try to recover my composure ; and I leave you to do the same.’

In the solitude of my room, I was able to look my position fairly in the face.

Mr. Gracedieu's wife had come to me, in the

long-past time, without her husband's knowledge. Tempted to a cruel resolve by the maternal triumph of having an infant of her own, she had resolved to rid herself of the poor little rival in her husband's fatherly affection, by consigning the adopted child to the keeping of a charitable asylum. She had dared to ask me to help her. I had kept the secret of her shameful visit—I can honestly say, for the Minister's sake. And now, long after time had doomed those events to oblivion, they were revived—and revived by me. Thanks to my folly, Mr. Gracedieu's daughter knew what I had concealed from Mr. Gracedieu himself.

What course did respect for my friend, and respect for myself, counsel me to take?

I could only see before me a choice of two evils. To wait for events—with the too certain prospect of a vindictive betrayal of my indiscretion by Helena Gracedieu. Or to take

the initiative into my own hands, and risk consequences which I might regret to the end of my life, by making my confession to the Minister.

Before I had decided, somebody knocked at the door. It was the maid-servant again. Was it possible she had been sent by Helena ?

‘ Another message ? ’

‘ Yes, sir. My master wishes to see you.’

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE GIRLS' AGES.

HAD the Minister's desire to see me been inspired by his daughter's betrayal of what I had unfortunately said to her? Although he would certainly not consent to receive her personally, she would be at liberty to adopt a written method of communication with him, and the letter might be addressed in such a manner as to pique his curiosity. If Helena's vindictive purpose had been already accomplished—and if Mr. Gracedieu left me no alternative but to present his unworthy wife in her true character—I can honestly say that I dreaded the consequences, not as they might

affect myself, but as they might affect my unhappy friend in his enfeebled state of body and mind.

When I entered his room, he was still in bed.

The bed-curtains were so drawn, on the side nearest to the window, as to keep the light from falling too brightly on his weak eyes. In the shadow thus thrown on him, it was not possible to see his face plainly enough, from the open side of the bed, to arrive at any definite conclusion as to what might be passing in his mind. After having been awake for some hours during the earlier part of the night, he had enjoyed a long and undisturbed sleep. 'I feel stronger this morning,' he said, 'and I wish to speak to you while my mind is clear.'

If the quiet tone of his voice was not an assumed tone, he was surely ignorant of all that had passed between his daughter and myself.

‘Eunice will be here soon,’ he proceeded, ‘and I ought to explain why I have sent for her to come and meet you. I have reasons, serious reasons, mind, for wishing you to compare her personal appearance with Helena’s personal appearance, and then to tell me which of the two, on a fair comparison, looks the oldest. Pray bear in mind that I attach the greatest importance to the conclusion at which you may arrive.’

He spoke more clearly and collectedly than I had heard him speak yet.

Here and there I detected hesitations and repetitions, which I have purposely passed over. The substance of what he said to me is all that I shall present in this place. Careful as I have been to keep my record of events within strict limits, I have written at a length which I was far indeed from contemplating when I accepted Mr. Gracedieu’s invitation.

Having promised to comply with the strange

request which he had addressed to me, I ventured to remind him of past occasions on which he had pointedly abstained, when the subject presented itself, from speaking of the girls' ages. 'You have left it to my discretion,' I added, 'to decide a question in which you are seriously interested, relating to your daughters. Have I no excuse for regretting that I have not been admitted to your confidence a little more freely?'

'You have every excuse,' he answered. 'But you trouble me all the same. There was something else that I had to say to you—and your curiosity gets in the way.'

He said this with a sullen emphasis. In my position, the worst of evils was suspense. I told him that my curiosity could wait; and I begged that he would relieve his mind of what was pressing on it at the moment.

'Let me think a little,' he said.

I waited anxiously for the decision at which

he might arrive. Nothing came of it to justify my misgivings. 'Leave what I have in my mind to ripen in my mind,' he said. 'The mystery about the girls' ages seems to irritate you. If I put my good friend's temper to any further trial, he will be of no use to me. Never mind if my head swims ; I'm used to that. Now listen !'

Strange as the preface was, the explanation that followed was stranger yet. I offer a shortened and simplified version, giving accurately the substance of what I heard.

The Minister entered without reserve on the mysterious subject of the ages. Eunice, he informed me, was nearly two years older than Helena. If she outwardly showed her superiority of age, any person acquainted with the circumstances under which the adopted infant had been received into Mr. Gracedieu's childless household, need only compare the so-called sisters in after-life, and would there-

upon identify the eldest-looking young lady of the two as the offspring of the woman who had been hanged for murder. With such a misfortune as this presenting itself as a possible prospect, the Minister was bound to prevent the girls from ignorantly betraying each other by allusions to their ages and their birthdays. After much thought, he had devised a desperate means of meeting the difficulty—already made known, as I am told, for the information of strangers who may read the pages that have gone before mine. My friend's plan of proceeding had, by the nature of it, exposed him to injurious comment, to embarrassing questions, and to doubts and misconceptions, all patiently endured in consideration of the security that had been attained. Proud of his explanation, Mr. Gracedieu's vanity called upon me to acknowledge that my curiosity had been satisfied, and my doubts completely set at rest.

No : my obstinate common sense was not reduced to submission, even yet. Looking back over a lapse of seventeen years, I asked what had happened, in that long interval, to justify the anxieties which still appeared to trouble my friend.

This time, my harmless curiosity could be gratified by a reply expressed in three words—nothing had happened.

Then what, in Heaven's name, was the Minister afraid of ?

His voice dropped to a whisper. He said :
'I am afraid of the women.'

Who were the women ?

Two of them actually proved to be the servants employed in Mr. Gracedieu's house, at the bygone time when he had brought the child home with him from the prison ! To point out the absurdity of the reasons that he gave for fearing what female curiosity might yet attempt, if circumstances happened to en-

courage it, would have been a mere waste of words. Dismissing the subject, I next ascertained that the Minister's doubts extended even to the two female warders, who had been appointed to watch the murderess in turn, during her last days in prison. I easily relieved his mind in this case. One of the warders was dead. The other had married a farmer in Australia. Had we exhausted the list of suspected persons yet? No: there was one more left; and the Minister declared that he had first met with her in my official residence, at the time when I was Governor of the prison.

‘She presented herself to me by name,’ he said; ‘and she spoke rudely. A Miss——’ He paused to consult his memory, and this time (thanks perhaps to his night’s rest) his memory answered the appeal. ‘I have got it!’ he cried—‘Miss Chance.’

My friend had interested me in his imagin-

any perils at last. It was just possible that he might have a formidable person to deal with now.

During my residence at Florence, the Chaplain and I had taken many a retrospective look (as old men will) at past events in our lives. My former colleague spoke of the time when he had performed clerical duty for his friend, the rector of a parish church in London. Neither he nor I had heard again of the 'Miss Chance' of our disagreeable prison experience, whom he had married to the dashing Dutch gentleman, Mr. Tenbruggen. We could only wonder what had become of that mysterious married pair.

Mr. Gracedieu being undoubtedly ignorant of the woman's marriage, it was not easy to say what the consequence might be, in his excitable state, if I informed him of it. He would, in all probability, conclude that I knew more of the woman than he did. I

decided on keeping my own counsel, for the present at least.

Passing at once, therefore, to the one consideration of any importance, I endeavoured to find out whether Mr. Gracedieu and Mrs. Tenbruggen had met, or had communicated with each other in any way, during the long period of separation that had taken place between the Minister and myself. If he had been so unlucky as to offend her, she was beyond all doubt an enemy to be dreaded. Apart, however, from a misfortune of this kind, she would rank, in my opinion, with the other harmless objects of Mr. Gracedieu's morbid distrust.

In making my inquiries, I found that I had an obstacle to contend with.

While he felt the renovating influence of the repose that he enjoyed, the Minister had been able to think and to express himself with less difficulty than usual. But the re-

serves of strength, on which the useful exercise of his memory depended, began to fail him as the interview proceeded. He distinctly recollected that ‘something unpleasant had passed between that audacious woman and himself.’ But at what date—and whether by word of mouth or by correspondence—was more than his memory could now recall. He believed he was not mistaken in telling me that he ‘had been in two minds about her.’ At one time, he was satisfied that he had taken wise measures for his own security, if she attempted to annoy him. But there was another and a later time, when doubts and fears had laid hold of him again. If I wanted to know how this had happened, he fancied it was through a dream ; and if I asked what the dream was, he could only beg and pray that I would spare his poor head.

Unwilling even yet to submit unconditionally to defeat, it occurred to me to try a last

experiment on my friend, without calling for any mental effort on his own part. The 'Miss Chance' of former days might, by a bare possibility, have written to him. I asked accordingly if he was in the habit of keeping his letters, and if he would allow me (when he had rested a little) to lay them open before him, so that he could look at the signatures. 'You might find the lost recollection in that way,' I suggested, 'at the bottom of one of your letters.'

He was in that state of weariness, poor fellow, in which a man will do anything for the sake of peace. Pointing to a cabinet in his room, he gave me a key taken from a little basket on his bed. 'Look for yourself,' he said. After some hesitation—for I naturally recoiled from examining another man's correspondence—I decided on opening the cabinet, at any rate.

The letters—a large collection—were, to

my relief, all neatly folded, and endorsed with the names of the writers. I could run harmlessly through bundle after bundle in search of the one name that I wanted, and still respect the privacy of the letters. My perseverance deserved a reward—and failed to get it. The name I wanted steadily eluded my search. Arriving at the upper shelf of the cabinet, I found it so high that I could barely reach it with my hand. Instead of getting more letters to look over, I pulled down two newspapers.

One of them was an old copy of *The Times*, dating back as far as the 13th December, 1858. It was carefully folded, longwise, with the title-page uppermost. On the first column, at the left-hand side of the sheet, appeared the customary announcements of Births. A mark with a blue pencil, against one of the advertisements, attracted my attention. I read these lines :

‘On the 10th inst., the wife of the Rev. Abel Gracedieu, of a daughter.’

The second newspaper bore a later date, and contained nothing that interested me. I naturally assumed that the advertisement in *The Times* had been inserted at the desire of Mrs. Gracedieu ; and, after all that I had heard, there was little difficulty in attributing the curious omission of the place in which the child had been born to the caution of her husband. If Mrs. Tenbruggen (then Miss Chance) had happened to see the advertisement in the great London newspaper, Mr. Gracedieu might yet have good reason to congratulate himself on his prudent method of providing against mischievous curiosity.

I turned towards the bed and looked at him. His eyes were closed. Was he sleeping? Or was he trying to remember what he had desired to say to me, when the demands which

I made on his memory had obliged him to wait for a later opportunity?

Either way, there was something that quickened my sympathies, in the spectacle of his helpless repose. It suggested to me personal reasons for his anxieties, which he had not mentioned, and which I had not thought of, up to this time. If the discovery that he dreaded took place, his household would be broken up, and his position as pastor would suffer in the estimation of the flock. His own daughter would refuse to live under the same roof with the daughter of an infamous woman. Popular opinion, among his congregation, judging a man who had passed off the child of other parents as his own, would find that man guilty of an act of deliberate deceit.

Still oppressed by reflections which pointed to the future in this discouraging way, I was

startled by a voice outside the door—a sweet sad voice—saying, ‘ May I come in ?’

The Minister’s eyes opened instantly ; he raised himself in his bed.

‘ Eunice at last !’ he cried. ‘ Let her in.’

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE ADOPTED CHILD.

I OPENED the door.

Eunice passed me with the suddenness almost of a flash of light. When I turned towards the bed, her arms were round her father's neck. 'Oh, poor Papa, how ill you look!' Common-place expressions of fondness, and no more; but the tone gave them a charm that subdued me. Never had I felt so indulgent towards Mr. Gracedieu's unreasonable fears as when I saw him in the embrace of his adopted daughter. She had already reminded me of the bygone day when a bright little child had sat on my knee and listened to the ticking of my watch.

The Minister gently lifted her head from his breast. ‘My darling,’ he said, ‘you don’t see my old friend. Love him, and look up to him, Eunice. He will be your friend too, when I am gone.’

She came to me and offered her cheek to be kissed. It was sadly pale, poor soul—and I could guess why. But her heart was now full of her father. ‘Do you think he is seriously ill?’ she whispered. What I ought to have said I don’t know. Her eyes, the sweetest, truest, loveliest eyes I ever saw in a human face, were pleading with me. Let my enemies make the worst of it, if they like—I did certainly lie. And if I deserved my punishment, I got it ; the poor child believed me! ‘Now I am happier,’ she said gratefully. ‘Only to hear your voice seems to encourage me. On our way here, Selina did nothing but talk of you. She told me I shouldn’t have time to feel afraid of the great man ; he would make

me fond of him directly. I said, "Are *you* fond of him?" She said, "Madly in love with him, my dear." My little friend really thinks you like her, and is very proud of it. There are some people who call her ugly. I hope you don't agree with them?"

I believe I should have lied again, if Mr. Gracedieu had not called me to the bedside.

'How does she strike you?' he whispered eagerly. 'Is it too soon to ask if she shows her age in her face?'

'Neither in her face nor her figure,' I answered; 'it astonishes me that you can ever have doubted it. No stranger, judging by personal appearance, could fail to make the mistake of thinking Helena the oldest of the two.'

He looked fondly at Eunice. 'Her figure seems to bear out what you say,' he went on. 'Almost childish, isn't it?'

I could not agree to that. Slim, supple,

simply graceful in every movement, Eunice's figure, in the charm of first youth, only waited its perfect development. Most men, looking at her as she stood at the other end of the room with her back towards us, would have guessed her age to be sixteen.

Finding that I failed to agree with him, Mr. Gracedieu's misgivings returned. 'You speak very confidently,' he said, 'considering that you have not seen the girls together. Think what a dreadful blow it would be to me if you made a mistake.'

I declared, with perfect sincerity, that there was no fear of a mistake. The bare idea of making the proposed comparison was hateful to me. If Helena and I had happened to meet at that moment, I should have turned away from her by instinct—she would have disturbed my impressions of Eunice.

The Minister signed to me to move a little nearer to him. 'I must say it,' he whispered,

‘and I am afraid of her hearing me. Is there anything in her face that reminds you of her miserable mother?’

I had hardly patience to answer the question: it was simply preposterous. Her hair was by many shades darker than her mother’s hair; her eyes were of a different colour. There was an exquisite tenderness and sincerity in their expression—made additionally beautiful, to my mind, by a gentle uncomplaining sadness. It was impossible even to think of the eyes of the murderess when I looked at her child. Eunice’s lower features, again, had none of her mother’s regularity of proportion. Her smile, simple and sweet, and soon passing away, was certainly not an inherited smile on the maternal side. Whether she resembled her father, I was unable to conjecture—having never seen him. The one thing certain was, that not the faintest trace, in feature or expression, of Eunice’s mother was to be seen in Eunice herself. Of

the two girls, Helena—judging by something in the colour of her hair, and by something in the shade of her complexion—might possibly have suggested, in those particulars only, a purely accidental resemblance to my terrible prisoner of past times.

The revival of Mr. Gracedieu's spirits indicated a temporary change only, and was already beginning to pass away. The eyes which had looked lovingly at Eunice began to look languidly now : his head sank on the pillow with a sigh of weak content. 'My pleasure has been almost too much for me,' he said. 'Leave me for a while to rest, and get used to it.'

Eunice kissed his forehead—and we left the room.

CHAPTER XL.

THE BRUISED HEART.

WHEN we stepped out on the landing, I observed that my companion paused. She looked at the two flights of stairs below us before she descended them. It occurred to me that there must be somebody in the house whom she was anxious to avoid.

Arrived at the lower hall, she paused again, and proposed in a whisper that we should go into the garden. As we advanced along the backward division of the hall, I saw her eyes turn distrustfully towards the door of the room in which Helena had received me. At last, my slow perceptions felt with her and

understood her. Eunice's sensitive nature recoiled from a chance meeting with the wretch, who had laid waste all that had once been happy and hopeful in that harmless young life.

‘Will you come with me to the part of the garden that I am fondest off?’ she asked.

I offered her my arm. She led me in silence to a rustic seat, placed under the shade of a mulberry tree. I saw a change in her face as we sat down—a tender and beautiful change. At that moment, the girl's heart was far away from me. There was some association with this corner of the garden, on which I felt that I must not intrude.

‘I was once very happy here,’ she said. ‘When the time of the heartache came soon after, I was afraid to look at the old tree and the bench under it. But that is all over now. I like to remember the hours that were once dear to me, and to see the place that recalls

them. Do you know who I am thinking of ? Don't be afraid of distressing me. I never cry now.'

'My dear child, I have heard your sad story—but I can't trust myself to speak of it.'

'Because you are so sorry for me ?'

'No words can say how sorry I am !'

'But you are not angry with Philip ?'

'Not angry ! My poor dear, I am afraid to tell you how angry I am with him.'

'Oh, no ! You mustn't say that. If you wish to be kind to me—and I am sure you do wish it—don't think bitterly of Philip.'

When I remember that the first feeling she roused in me was nothing worthier of a professing Christian than astonishment, I drop in my own estimation to the level of a savage. 'Do you really mean,' I was base enough to ask, 'that you have forgiven him ?'

She said gently : 'How could I help forgiving him ?'

The man who could have been blest with such love as this, and who could have cast it away from him, can have been nothing but an idiot. On that ground—though I dared not confess it to Eunice—I forgave him too.

‘Do I surprise you?’ she asked simply. ‘Perhaps love will bear any humiliation. Or perhaps I am only a poor weak creature. You don’t know what a comfort it was to me to keep the few letters that I received from Philip. When I heard that he had gone away, I gave his letters the kiss that bade him good-bye. That was the time, I think, when my poor bruised heart got used to the pain ; I began to feel that there was one consolation still left for me—I might end in forgiving him. Why do I tell you all this? I think you must have bewitched me. Is this really the first time I have seen you?’

She put her little trembling hand into mine : I lifted it to my lips, and kissed it. Sorely

was I tempted to own that I had pitied and loved her in her infancy. It was almost on my lips to say : ‘I remember you an easily-pleased little creature, amusing yourself with the broken toys which were once the play-things of my own children.’ I believe I should have said it, if I could have trusted myself to speak composedly to her. This was not to be done. Old as I was, versed as I was in the hard knowledge of how to keep the mask on in the hour of need, this was not to be done.

Still trying to understand that I was little better than a stranger to her, and still bent on finding the secret of the sympathy that united us, Eunice put a strange question to me.

‘When you were young yourself,’ she said, ‘did you know what it was to love, and to be loved—and then to lose it all?’

It is not given to many men to marry the

woman who has been the object of their first love. My early life had been darkened by a sad story ; never confided to any living creature ; banished resolutely from my own thoughts. For forty years past, that part of my buried self had lain quiet in its grave—and the chance touch of an innocent hand had raised the dead, and set us face to face again ! Did I know what it was to love, and to be loved, and then to lose it all ? ‘ Too well, my child ; too well ! ’

That was all I could say to her. In the last days of my life, I shrank from speaking of it. When I had first felt that calamity, and had felt it most keenly, I might have given an answer worthier of me, and worthier of her.

She dropped my hand, and sat by me in silence, thinking. Had I—without meaning it, God knows !—had I disappointed her ?

‘ Did you expect me to tell my own sad

story,' I said, 'as frankly and as trustfully as you have told yours?'

'Oh, don't think that! I know what an effort it was to you to answer me at all. Yes, indeed! I wonder whether I may ask something. The sorrow you have just told me of is not the only one—is it? You have had other troubles?'

'Many of them.'

'There are times,' she went on, 'when one can't help thinking of one's own miserable self. I try to be cheerful, but those times come now and then.'

She stopped, and looked at me with a pale fear confessing itself in her face.

'You know who Selina is?' she resumed. 'My friend! The only friend I had, till you came here.'

I guessed that she was speaking of the quaint kindly little woman, whose ugly surname had been hitherto the only name known to me.

‘Selina has, I dare say, told you that I have been ill,’ she continued, ‘and that I am staying in the country for the benefit of my health.’

It was plain that she had something to say to me, far more important than this, and that she was dwelling on trifles to gain time and courage. Hoping to help her, I dwelt on trifles too ; asking commonplace questions about the part of the country in which she was staying. She answered absently—then, little by little, impatiently. The one poor proof of kindness that I could offer, now, was to say no more.

‘Do you know what a strange creature I am ?’ she broke out. ‘Shall I make you angry with me ? or shall I make you laugh at me ? What I have shrunk from confessing to Selina—what I dare not confess to my father—I must, and will, confess to You!’

There was a look of horror in her face that alarmed me. I drew her to me so that she

could rest her head on my shoulder. My own agitation threatened to get the better of me. For the first time since I had seen this sweet girl, I found myself thinking of the blood that ran in her veins, and of the nature of the mother who had borne her.

‘Did you notice how I behaved upstairs?’ she said. ‘I mean when we left my father, and came out on the landing.’

It was easily recollected; I begged her to go on.

‘Before I went downstairs,’ she proceeded, ‘you saw me look and listen. Did you think I was afraid of meeting some person? and did you guess who it was I wanted to avoid?’

‘I guessed that—and I understood you.’

‘No! You are not wicked enough to understand me. Will you do me a favour? I want you to look at me.’

It was said seriously. She lifted her head for a moment, so that I could examine her face.

‘Do you see anything,’ she asked, ‘which makes you fear that I am not in my right mind?’

‘Good God! how can you ask such a horrible question?’

She laid her head back on my shoulder with a sad little sigh of resignation. ‘I ought to have known better,’ she said; ‘there is no such easy way out of it as that. Tell me—is there one kind of wickedness more deceitful than another? Can it lie hid in a person for years together, and show itself when a time of suffering—no; I mean when a sense of injury comes? Did you ever see that, when you were master in the prison?’

I had seen it—and, after a moment’s doubt, I said I had seen it.

‘Did you pity those poor wretches?’

‘Certainly! They deserved pity.’

‘I am one of them!’ she said. ‘Pity *me*. If Helena looks at me—if Helena speaks to

me—if I only see Helena by accident—do you know what she does ? She tempts me ! Tempts me to do dreadful things ! Tempts me——’ The poor child threw her arms round my neck, and whispered the next fatal words in my ear.

The mother ! Prepared as I was for the accursed discovery, the horror of it shook me.

She left me, and started to her feet. The inherited energy showed itself in furious protest against the inherited evil. ‘What does it mean ?’ she cried. ‘I’ll submit to anything. I’ll bear my hard lot patiently, if you will only tell me what it means. Where does this horrid transformation of me out of myself come from ? Look at my good father. In all this world there is no man so perfect as he is. And oh, how he has taught me ! there isn’t a single good thing that I have not learnt from him since I was a little child. Did you ever hear him speak of my mother ? You must

have heard him. My mother was an angel. I could never be worthy of her at my best—but I have tried ! I have tried ! The wickedest girl in the world doesn't have worse thoughts than the thoughts that have come to me. Since when ? Since Helena—oh, how can I call her by her name as if I still loved her ? Since my sister—can she be my sister, I ask myself sometimes ! Since my enemy—there's the word for her—since my enemy took Philip away from me. What does it mean ? I have asked in my prayers—and have got no answer. I ask you. What does it mean ? You must tell me ! You shall tell me ! What does it mean ?'

Why did I not try to calm her ? I had vainly tried to calm her—I who knew who her mother was, and what her mother had been.

At last, she had forced the sense of my duty on me. The simplest way of calming her

was to put her back in the place by my side that she had left. It was useless to reason with her, it was impossible to answer her. I had my own idea of the one way in which I might charm Eunice back to her sweeter self.

‘Let us talk of Philip,’ I said.

The fierce flush on her face softened, the swelling trouble of her bosom began to subside, as that dearly-loved name passed my lips ! But there was some influence left in her which resisted me.

‘No,’ she said : ‘we had better not talk of him.’

‘Why not ?’

‘I have lost all my courage. If you speak of Philip, you will make me cry.’

I drew her nearer to me. If she had been my own child, I don’t think I could have felt for her more truly than I felt at that moment. I only looked at her ; I only said :

‘Cry !’

The love that was in her heart rose, and poured its tenderness into her eyes. I had longed to see the tears that would comfort her. The tears came.

There was silence between us for a while. It was possible for me to think.

In the absence of physical resemblance between parent and child, is an unfavourable influence exercised on the tendency to moral resemblance? Assuming the possibility of such a result as this, Eunice (entirely unlike her mother) must, as I concluded, have been possessed of qualities formed to resist, as well as of qualities doomed to undergo, the infection of evil. While, therefore, I resigned myself to recognise the existence of the hereditary maternal taint, I firmly believed in the counterbalancing influences for good which had been part of the girl's birthright. They had been derived, perhaps, from the better qualities in

her father's nature ; they had been certainly developed by the tender care, the religious vigilance, which had guarded the adopted child so lovingly in the Minister's household ; and they had served their purpose until time brought with it the change, for which the tranquil domestic influences were not prepared. With the great, the vital transformation, which marks the ripening of the girl into the woman's maturity of thought and passion, a new power for Good, strong enough to resist the latent power for Evil, sprang into being, and sheltered Eunice under the supremacy of Love. Love ill-fated and ill-bestowed—but love that no profanation could stain, that no hereditary evil could conquer—the True Love that had been, and was, and would be, the guardian angel of Eunice's life.

If I am asked whether I have ventured to found this opinion on what I have observed in one instance only, I reply that I have had

other opportunities of investigation, and that my conclusions are derived from experience which refers to more instances than one.

No man in his senses can doubt that physical qualities are transmitted from parents to children. But inheritance of moral qualities is less easy to trace. Here, the exploring mind finds its progress beset by obstacles. That those obstacles have been sometimes overcome I do not deny. Moral resemblances have been traced between parents and children. While, however, I admit this, I doubt the conclusion which sees, in inheritance of moral qualities, a positive influence exercised on mortal destiny. There are inherent emotional forces in humanity to which the inherited influences must submit; they are essentially influences under control—influences which can be encountered and forced back. That we, who inhabit this little planet, may be the doomed creatures of fatality, from the cradle

to the grave, I am not prepared to dispute. But I absolutely refuse to believe that it is a fatality with no higher origin than can be found in our accidental obligation to our fathers and mothers.

Still absorbed in these speculations, I was disturbed by a touch on my arm.

I looked up. Eunice's eyes were fixed on a shrubbery, at some little distance from us, which closed the view of the garden on that side. I noticed that she was trembling. Nothing to alarm her was visible that I could discover. I asked what she had seen to startle her. She pointed to the shrubbery.

‘Look again,’ she said.

This time I saw a woman's dress among the shrubs. The woman herself appeared in a moment more.

It was Helena. She carried a small portfolio, and she approached us with a smile.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE WHISPERING VOICE.

I LOOKED at Eunice. She had risen, startled by her first suspicion of the person who was approaching us through the shrubbery ; but she kept her place near me, only changing her position so as to avoid confronting Helena. Her quickened breathing was all that told me of the effort she was making to preserve her self-control.

Entirely free from unbecoming signs of hurry and agitation, Helena opened her business with me by means of an apology.

‘ Pray excuse me for disturbing you. I am obliged to leave the house on one of my

tiresome domestic errands. If you will kindly permit it, I wish to express, before I go, my very sincere regret for what I was rude enough to say, when I last had the honour of seeing you. May I hope to be forgiven? How-do-you-do, Eunice? Have you enjoyed your holiday in the country?’

Eunice neither moved nor answered. Having some doubt of what might happen if the two girls remained together, I proposed to Helena to leave the garden and to let me hear what she had to say, in the house.

‘Quite needless,’ she replied; ‘I shall not detain you for more than a minute. Please look at this.’

She offered to me the portfolio that she had been carrying, and pointed to a morsel of paper attached to it, which contained this inscription :

‘Philip’s Letters To Me. Private. Helena Gracedieu.’

‘I have a favour to ask,’ she said, ‘and a proof of confidence in you to offer. Will you be so good as to look over what you find in my portfolio? I am unwilling to give up the hopes that I had founded on our interview, when I asked for it. The letters will, I venture to think, plead my cause more convincingly than I was able to plead it for myself. I wish to forget what passed between us, to the last word. To the last word,’ she repeated emphatically — with a look which sufficiently informed me that I had not been betrayed to her father yet. ‘Will you indulge me?’ she asked, and offered her portfolio for the second time.

A more impudent bargain could not well have been proposed to me.

I was to read, and to be favourably impressed by, Mr. Philip Dunboyne’s letters; and Miss Helena was to say nothing of that unlucky slip of the tongue, relating to her

mother, which she had discovered to be a serious act of self-betrayal—thanks to my confusion at the time. If I had not thought of Eunice, and of the desolate and loveless life to which the poor girl was so patiently resigned, I should have refused to read Miss Gracedieu's love-letters.

But, as things were, I was influenced by the hope (innocently encouraged by Eunice herself) that Philip Dunboyne might not be so wholly unworthy of the sweet girl whom he had injured, as I had hitherto been too hastily disposed to believe. To act on this view with the purpose of promoting a reconciliation was impossible, unless I had the means of forming a correct estimate of the man's character. It seemed to me that I had found the means. A fair chance of putting his sincerity to a trustworthy test, was surely offered by the letters (the confidential letters) which I had been requested to read. To feel

this as strongly as I felt it, brought me at once to a decision. I consented to take the portfolio—on my own conditions.

‘Understand, Miss Helena,’ I said, ‘that I make no promises. I reserve my own opinion, and my own right of action.’

‘I am not afraid of your opinions or your actions,’ she answered confidently, ‘if you will only read the letters. In the meantime, let me relieve my sister, there, of my presence. I hope you will soon recover, Eunice, in the country air.’

If the object of the wretch was to exasperate her victim, she had completely failed. Eunice remained as still as a statue. To all appearance, she had not even heard what had been said to her. Helena looked at me, and touched her forehead with a significant smile. ‘Sad, isn’t it?’ she said—and bowed, and went briskly away on her household errand.

We were alone again.

Still, Eunice never moved. I spoke to her, and produced no impression. Beginning to feel alarmed, I tried the effect of touching her. With a wild cry, she started into a state of animation. Almost at the same moment, she weakly swayed to and fro as if the pleasant breeze in the garden moved her at its will, like the flowers. I held her up, and led her to the seat.

‘There is nothing to be afraid of,’ I said.
‘She has gone.’

Eunice’s eyes rested on me in vacant surprise.

‘How do you know?’ she asked. ‘I hear her; but I never see her. Do you see her?’

‘My dear child! of what person are you speaking?’

She answered: ‘Of no person. I am speaking of a Voice that whispers and tempts me, when Helena is near.’

‘What voice, Eunice?’

‘The whispering Voice. It said to me, “I am your mother;” it called me Daughter when I first heard it. My father speaks of my mother, the angel. That good spirit has never come to me from the better world. It is a mock-mother who comes to me—some spirit of evil. Listen to this. I was awake in my bed. In the dark I heard the mock-mother whispering, close at my ear. Shall I tell you how she answered me, when I longed for light to see her by, when I prayed to her to show herself to me? She said: “My face was hidden when I passed from life to death; my face no mortal creature may see.” I have never seen her—how can *you* have seen her? But I heard her again, just now. She whispered to me when Helena was standing there—where you are standing. She freezes the life in me. Did she freeze the life in *you*? Did you hear her tempting me? Don’t speak

of it, if you did. Oh, not a word ! not a word !

A man who has governed a prison may say with Macbeth, ‘ I have supped full with horrors.’ Hardened as I was—or ought to have been—the effect of what I had just heard turned me cold. If I had not known it to be absolutely impossible, I might have believed that the crime and the death of the murderess were known to Eunice, as being the crime and the death of her mother, and that the horrid discovery had turned her brain. This was simply impossible. What did it mean ? Good God ! what did it mean ?

My sense of my own helplessness was the first sense in me that recovered. I thought of Eunice’s devoted little friend. A woman’s sympathy seemed to be needed now. I rose to lead the way out of the garden.

‘ Selina will think we are lost,’ I said. ‘ Let us go and find Selina.’

‘Not for the world,’ she cried.

‘Why not?’

‘Because I don’t feel sure of myself. I might tell Selina something which she must never know ; I should be so sorry to frighten her. Let me stop here with you.’

I resumed my place at her side.

‘Let me take your hand.’

I gave her my hand. What composing influence this simple act may, or may not, have exercised, it is impossible to say. She was quiet, she was silent. After an interval, I heard her breathe a long-drawn sigh of relief.

‘I am afraid I have surprised you,’ she said. ‘Helena brings the dreadful time back to me——’ She stopped and shuddered.

‘Don’t speak of Helena, my dear.’

‘But I am afraid you will think—because I have said strange things—that I have been talking at random,’ she insisted. ‘The doctor

will say that, if you meet with him. He believes I am deluded by a dream. I tried to think so myself. It was of no use ; I am quite sure he is wrong.'

I privately determined to watch for the doctor's arrival, and to consult with him. Eunice went on :

'I have the story of a terrible night to tell you ; but I haven't the courage to tell it now. Why shouldn't you come back with me to the place that I am staying at ? A pleasant farmhouse, and such kind people. You might read the account of that night in my journal. I shall not regret the misery of having written it, if it helps you to find out how this hateful second self of mine has come to me. Hush ! I want to ask you something. Do you think Helena is in the house ?'

'No—she has gone out.'

'Did she say that herself ? Are you sure ?'

'Quite sure.'

She decided on going back to the farm, while Helena was out of the way. We left the garden together. For the first time, my companion noticed the portfolio. I happened to be carrying it in the hand that was nearest to her, as she walked by my side.

‘Where did you get that?’ she asked.

It was needless to reply in words. My hesitation spoke for me.

‘Carry it in your other hand,’ she said—
‘the hand that’s farthest away from me. I don’t want to see it! Do you mind waiting a moment while I find Selina? You will go to the farm with us, won’t you?’

I had to look over the letters, in Eunice’s own interests; and I begged her to let me defer my visit to the farm until the next day. She consented, after making me promise to keep my appointment. It was of some importance to her, she told me, that I should make acquaintance with the farmer and his wife and

children, and tell her how I liked them. Her plans for the future depended on what those good people might be willing to do. When she had recovered her health, it was impossible for her to go home again while Helena remained in the house. She had resolved to earn her own living, if she could get employment as a governess. The farmer's children liked her ; she had already helped their mother in teaching them ; and there was reason to hope that their father would see his way to employing her permanently. His house offered the great advantage of being near enough to the town, to enable her to hear news of the Minister's progress towards recovery, and to see him herself when safe opportunities offered, from time to time. As for her salary, what did she care about money ? Anything would be acceptable, if the good man would only realize her hopes for the future.

It was disheartening to hear that hope, at

her age, began and ended within such narrow limits as these. No prudent man would have tried to persuade her, as I now did, that the idea of reconciliation offered the better hope of the two.

‘Suppose I see Mr. Philip Dunboyne when I go back to London,’ I began, ‘what shall I say to him?’

‘Say I have forgiven him.’

‘And suppose,’ I went on, ‘that the blame really rests, where you all believe it to rest, with Helena. If that young man returns to you, truly ashamed of himself, truly penitent, will you——?’

She resolutely interrupted me: ‘No!’

‘Oh, Eunice, you surely mean Yes?’

‘I mean No!’

‘Why?’

‘Don’t ask me! Good-bye till to-morrow.’

CHAPTER XLII.

THE QUAIN'T PHILOSOPHER.

No person came to my room, and nothing happened to interrupt me while I was reading Mr. Philip Dunboyne's letters.

One of them, let me say at once, produced a very disagreeable impression on me. I have unexpectedly discovered Mrs. Tenbruggen—in a postscript. She is making a living as a Medical Rubber (or Masseuse), and is in professional attendance on Mr. Dunboyne the elder. More of this, a little farther on.

Having gone through the whole collection of young Dunboyne's letters, I set myself to review the differing conclusions which the correspondence had produced on my mind.

I call the papers submitted to me a correspondence, because the greater part of Philip's letters exhibit notes in pencil, evidently added by Helena. These express, for the most part, the interpretation which she had placed on passages that perplexed or displeased her ; and they have, as Philip's rejoinders show, been employed as materials when she wrote her replies.

On reflection, I find myself troubled by complexities and contradictions in the view presented of this young man's character. To decide positively whether I can justify to myself and to my regard for Eunice, an attempt to reunite the lovers, requires more time for consideration than I can reasonably expect that Helena's patience will allow. Having a quiet hour or two still before me, I have determined to make extracts from the letters for my own use ; with the intention of referring to them, while I am still in doubt which way my decision

ought to incline. I shall present them here, to speak for themselves. Is there any objection to this? None that I can see.

In the first place, these extracts have a value of their own. They add necessary information to the present history of events.

In the second place, I am under no obligation to Mr. Gracedieu's daughter which forbids me to make use of her portfolio. I told her that I only consented to receive it, under reserve of my own right of action—and her assent to that stipulation was expressed in the clearest terms.

EXTRACTS FROM MR. PHILIP DUNBOYNE'S
LETTERS.

First Extract.

You blame me, dear Helena, for not having paid proper attention to the questions put to me in your last letter. I have only been waiting to make up my mind, before I replied.

First question : Do I think it advisable that you should write to my father ? No, my dear ; I beg you will defer writing, until you hear from me again.

Second question : Considering that he is still a stranger to you, is there any harm in your asking me what sort of man my father is ? No harm, my sweet one ; but, as you will presently see, I am afraid you have addressed yourself to the wrong person.

My father is kind, in his own odd way—and learned, and rich—a more high-minded and honourable man (as I have every reason to believe) doesn't live. But if you ask me which he prefers, his books or his son, I hope I do him no injustice when I answer, his books. His reading and his writing are obstacles between us which I have never been able to overcome. This is the more to be regretted because he is charming, on the few occasions when I find him disengaged. If

you wish I knew more about my father, we are in complete agreement as usual—I wish, too.

But there is a dear friend of yours and mine, who is just the person we want to help us. Need I say that I allude to Mrs. Staveley ?

I called on her yesterday, not long after she had paid a visit to my father. Luck had favoured her. She arrived just at the time when hunger had obliged him to shut up his books, and ring for something to eat. Mrs. Staveley secured a favourable reception with her customary tact and delicacy. He had a fowl for his dinner. She knows his weakness of old ; she volunteered to carve it for him.

If I can only repeat what this clever woman told me of their talk, you will have a portrait of Mr. Dunboyne the elder—not perhaps a highly-finished picture, but, as I hope and believe, a good likeness.

Mrs. Staveley began by complaining to him

of the conduct of his son. I had promised to write to her, and I had never kept my word. She had reasons for being especially interested in my plans and prospects, just then ; knowing me to be attached (please take notice that I am quoting her own language) to a charming friend of hers, whom I had first met at her house. To aggravate the disappointment that I had inflicted, the young lady had neglected her too. No letters, no information. Perhaps my father would kindly enlighten her? Was the affair going on? or was it broken off?

My father held out his plate and asked for the other wing of the fowl. 'It isn't a bad one for London,' he said ; 'won't you have some yourself?'

'I don't seem to have interested you,' Mrs. Staveley remarked.

'What did you expect me to be interested in?' my father inquired. 'I was absorbed in

the fowl. Favour me by returning to the subject.'

Mrs. Staveley admits that she answered this rather sharply : ' The subject, sir, was your son's admiration for a charming girl : one of the daughters of Mr. Gracedieu, the famous preacher.'

My father is too well-bred to speak to a lady while his attention is absorbed by a fowl. He finished the second wing, and then he asked if ' Philip was engaged to be married.'

' I am not quite sure,' Mrs. Staveley confessed.

' Then, my dear friend, we will wait till we *are* sure.'

' But, Mr. Dunboyne, there is really no need to wait. I suppose your son comes here, now and then, to see you ?'

' My son is most attentive. In course of time he will contrive to hit on the right hour

for his visit. At present, poor fellow, he interrupts me every day.'

'Suppose he hits upon the right time to-morrow?'

'Yes?'

'You might ask him if he is engaged?'

'Pardon me. I think I might wait till Philip mentions it without asking.'

'What an extraordinary man you are!'

'Oh, no, no—only a philosopher.'

This tried Mrs. Staveley's temper. You know what a perfectly candid person our friend is. She owned to me that she felt inclined to make herself disagreeable. 'That's thrown away upon me,' she said: 'I don't know what a philosopher is.'

Let me pause for a moment, dear Helena. I have inexcusably forgotten to speak of my father's personal appearance. It won't take long. I need only notice one interesting feature which, so to speak, lifts his face out

of the common. He has an eloquent nose. Persons possessing this rare advantage are blest with powers of expression not granted to their ordinary fellow-creatures. My father's nose is a mine of information to friends familiarly acquainted with it. It changes colour like a modest young lady's cheek. It works flexibly from side to side like the rudder of a ship. On the present occasion, Mrs. Staveley saw it shift towards the left-hand side of his face. A sigh escaped the poor lady. Experience told her that my father was going to hold forth.

‘ You don't know what a philosopher is ?’ he repeated. ‘ Be so kind as to look at Me. I am a philosopher.’

Mrs. Staveley bowed.

‘ And a philosopher, my charming friend, is a man who has discovered a system of life. Some systems assert themselves in volumes—*my* system asserts itself in two words : Never

think of anything until you have first asked yourself if there is an absolute necessity for doing it, at that particular moment. Thinking of things, when things needn't be thought of, is offering an opportunity to Worry ; and Worry is the favourite agent of Death when the destroyer handles his work in a lingering way, and achieves premature results. Never look back, and never look forward, as long as you can possibly help it. Looking back leads the way to sorrow. And looking forward ends in the cruellest of all delusions : it encourages hope. The present time is the precious time. Live for the passing day ; the passing day is all that we can be sure of. You suggested, just now, that I should ask my son if he was engaged to be married. How do we know what wear and tear of your nervous texture I succeeded in saving when I said : " Wait till Philip mentions it without asking " ? There is the personal application of my system.

I have explained it in my time to every woman on the list of my acquaintance, including the female servants. Not one of them has rewarded me by adopting my system. How do you feel about it?’

Mrs. Staveley declined to tell me whether she had offered a bright example of gratitude to the rest of the sex. When I asked why, she declared that it was my turn now to tell her what I had been doing.

You will anticipate what followed. She objected to the mystery in which my prospects seemed to be involved. In plain English, was I, or was I not, engaged to marry her dear Eunice? I said, No. What else could I say? If I had told Mrs. Staveley the truth, when she insisted on my explaining myself, she would have gone back to my father, and would have appealed to his sense of justice to forbid our marriage. Finding me obstinately silent, she has decided on writing to Eunice. So we

parted. But don't be disheartened. On my way out of the house, I met Mr. Staveley coming in, and had a little talk with him. He and his wife and his family are going to the seaside, next week. Mrs. Staveley once out of our way, I can tell my father of our engagement without any fear of consequences. If she writes to him, the moment he sees my name mentioned, and finds violent language associated with it, he will hand the letter to me. 'Your business, Philip; don't interrupt me.' He will say that, and go back to his books. There is my father, painted to the life! Farewell, for the present.

* * * * *

Remarks by H. G.—Philip's grace and gaiety of style might be envied by any professional Author. He amuses me, but he rouses my suspicion at the same time. This slippery lover of mine tells me to defer writing to his father, and gives no reason

for offering that strange advice to the young lady who is soon to be a member of the family. Is this merely one more instance of the weakness of his character ? Or, now that he is away from my influence, is he beginning to regret Eunice already ?

Added by the Governor.—I too have my doubts. Is the flippant nonsense which Philip has written, inspired by the effervescent good spirits of a happy young man ? Or is it assumed for a purpose ? In this latter case, I should gladly conclude, that he was regarding his conduct to Eunice with becoming emotions of sorrow and shame.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MASTERFUL MASSEUSE.

My next quotations will suffer a process of abridgment. I intend them to present the substance of three letters, reduced as follows :

Second Extract.

Weak as he may be, Mr. Philip Dunboyne shows (in his second letter) that he can feel resentment, and that he can express his feelings, in replying to Miss Helena. He protests against suspicions which he has not deserved. That he does sometimes think of Eunice he sees no reason to deny. He is

conscious of errors and misdeeds, which—traceable as they are to Helena's irresistible fascinations—may perhaps be considered rather his misfortune than his fault. Be that as it may, he does indeed feel anxious to hear good accounts of Eunice's health. If this honest avowal excites her sister's jealousy, he will be disappointed in Helena for the first time.

His third letter shows that this exhibition of spirit has had its effect.

The imperious young lady regrets that she has hurt his feelings, and is rewarded for the apology by receiving news of the most gratifying kind. Faithful Philip has told his father that he is engaged to be married to Miss Helena Gracedieu, daughter of the celebrated Congregational preacher—and so on, and so on. Has Mr. Dunboyne the elder expressed any objection to the young lady? Certainly not! He knows nothing of the other engagement to Eunice; and he merely objects,

on principle, to looking forward. ‘How do we know,’ says the philosopher, ‘what accidents may happen, or what doubts and hesitations may yet turn up? I am not to burden my mind in this matter, till I know that I must do it. Let me hear when she is ready to go to church, and I will be ready with the settlements. My compliments to Miss and her Papa, and let us wait a little.’ Dearest Helena—isn’t he funny?

The next letter has been already mentioned.

In this there occurs the first startling reference to Mrs. Tenbruggen, by name. She is in London, finding her way to lucrative celebrity by twisting, turning, and pinching the flesh of credulous persons, afflicted with nervous disorders; and she has already paid a few medical visits to old Mr. Dunboyne. He persists in poring over his books while Mrs. Tenbruggen operates, sometimes on his cramped right hand, sometimes (in the fear

that his brain may have something to do with it) on the back of his neck. One of them frowns over her rubbing, and the other frowns over his reading. It would be delightfully ridiculous, but for a drawback ; Mr. Philip Dunboyne's first impressions of Mrs. Tenbruggen do not incline him to look at that lady from a humorous point of view.

Helena's remarks follow as usual. She has seen Mrs. Tenbruggen's name on the address of a letter written by Miss Jillgall—which is quite enough to condemn Mrs. Tenbruggen. As for Philip himself, she feels not quite sure of him, even yet. No more do I.

Third Extract.

The letter that follows must be permitted to speak for itself :

I have flown into a passion, dearest Helena ; and I am afraid I shall make you fly into a

passion too. Blame Mrs. Tenbruggen ; don't blame me.

On the first occasion when I found my father under the hands of the Medical Rubber, she took no notice of me. On the second occasion—when she had been in daily attendance on him for a week, at an exorbitant fee—she said in the coolest manner : ‘ Who is this young gentleman ? ’ My father laid down his book, for a moment only : ‘ Don't interrupt me again, Ma'am. The young gentleman is my son Philip. ’ Mrs. Tenbruggen eyed me with an appearance of interest which I was at a loss to account for. I hate an impudent woman. My visit came suddenly to an end.

The next time I saw my father, he was alone.

I asked him how he got on with Mrs. Tenbruggen. As badly as possible, it appeared. ‘ She takes liberties with my neck ; she interrupts me in my reading ; and she

does me no good. I shall end, Philip, in applying a medical rubbing to Mrs. Tenbruggen.'

A few days later, I found the masterful 'Masseuse' torturing the poor old gentleman's muscles again. She had the audacity to say to me: 'Well, Mr. Philip, when are you going to marry Miss Eunice Gracedieu?' My father looked up. 'Eunice?' he repeated. 'When my son told me he was engaged to Miss Gracedieu, he said "Helena!" Philip, what does this mean?' Mrs. Tenbruggen was so obliging as to answer for me. 'Some mistake, sir; it's Eunice he is engaged to.' I confess I forgot myself. 'How the devil do you know that?' I burst out. Mrs. Tenbruggen ignored me and my language. 'I am sorry to see, sir, that your son's education has been neglected; he seems to be grossly ignorant of the laws of politeness.' 'Never mind the laws of politeness,' says my father

‘You appear to be better acquainted with my son’s matrimonial prospects than he is himself. How is that?’ Mrs. Tenbruggen favoured him with another ready reply: ‘My authority is a letter, addressed to me by a relative of Mr. Gracedieu—my dear and intimate friend, Miss Jillgall.’ My father’s keen eyes travelled backwards and forwards between his female surgeon and his son. ‘Which am I to believe?’ he inquired. ‘I am surprised at your asking the question,’ I said. Mrs. Tenbruggen pointed to me. ‘Look at Mr. Philip, sir—and you will allow him one merit. He is capable of showing it, when he knows he has disgraced himself.’ Without intending it, I am sure, my father infuriated me; he looked as if he believed her. Out came one of the smallest and strongest words in the English language before I could stop it: ‘Mrs. Tenbruggen, you lie!’ The illustrious Rubber dropped my father’s hand—she had

been operating on him all the time—and showed us that she could assert her dignity when circumstances called for the exertion : ‘ Either your son or I, sir, must leave the room. Which is it to be ? ’ She met her match in my father. Walking quietly to the door, he opened it for Mrs. Tenbruggen with a low bow. She stopped on her way out, and delivered her parting words : ‘ Messieurs Dunboyne, father and son, I keep my temper, and merely regard you as a couple of blackguards.’ With that pretty assertion of her opinion, she left us.

When we were alone, there was but one course to take ; I made my confession. It is impossible to tell you how my father received it—for he sat down at his library table with his back to me. The first thing he did was to ask me to help his memory.

‘ Did you say that the father of these girls was a parson ? ’

‘Yes—a Congregational Minister.’

‘What does the Minister think of you?’

‘I don’t know, sir.’

‘Find out.’

That was all; not another word could I extract from him. I don’t pretend to have discovered what he really has in his mind. I only venture on a suggestion. If there is any old friend in your town, who has some influence over your father, leave no means untried of getting that friend to say a kind word for us. And then ask your father to write to mine. This is, as I see it, our only chance.

* * * * *

There the letter ends. Helena’s notes on it show that her pride is fiercely interested in securing Philip as a husband. Her victory over poor Eunice will, as she plainly intimates, be only complete when she is married to young Dunboyne. For the rest, her desperate resolu-

tion to win her way to my good graces is sufficiently intelligible, now.

My own impressions vary. Philip rather gains upon me ; he appears to have some capacity for feeling ashamed of himself. On the other hand, I regard the discovery of an intimate friendship existing between Mrs. Tenbruggen and Miss Jillgall with the gloomiest views. Is this formidable Masseuse likely to ply her trade in the country towns ? And is it possible that she may come to this town ? God forbid !

Of the other letters in the collection, I need take no special notice. I returned the whole correspondence to Helena, and waited to hear from her.

The one recent event in Mr. Gracedieu's family, worthy of record, is of a melancholy nature. After paying his visit to-day, the doctor has left word that nobody but the nurse is to go near the Minister. This seems

to indicate, but too surely, a change for the worse.

Helena has been away all the evening at the Girls' School. She left a little note, informing me of her wishes : 'I shall expect to be favoured with your decision to-morrow morning, in my housekeeping room.'

At breakfast time, the report of the poor Minister was still discouraging. I noticed that Helena was absent from the table. Miss Jillgall suspected that the cause was bad news from Mr. Philip Dunboyne, arriving by that morning's post. 'If you will excuse the use of strong language by a lady,' she said, 'Helena looked perfectly devilish when she opened the letter. She rushed away, and locked herself up in her own shabby room. A serious obstacle, as I suspect, in the way of her marriage. Cheering, isn't it?' As usual, good Selina expressed her sentiments without reserve.

I had to keep my appointment ; and the

sooner Helena Gracedieu and I understood each other the better.

I knocked at the door. It was loudly unlocked, and violently thrown open. Helena's temper had risen to boiling heat; she stammered with rage when she spoke to me.

'I mean to come to the point at once,' she said.

'I am glad to hear it, Miss Helena.'

'May I count on your influence to help me? I want a positive answer.'

I gave her what she wanted. I said: 'Certainly not.'

She took a crumpled letter from her pocket, opened it, and smoothed it out on the table with a blow of her open hand.

'Look at that,' she said.

I looked. It was the letter addressed to Mr. Dunboyne the elder, which I had written for Mr. Gracedieu—with the one object of preventing Helena's marriage.

‘Of course, I can depend on you to tell me the truth?’ she continued.

‘Without fear or favour,’ I answered, ‘you may depend on *that*.’

‘The signature to the letter, Mr. Governor, is written by my father. But the letter itself is in a different hand. Do you, by any chance, recognise the writing?’

‘I do.’

‘Whose writing is it?’

‘Mine.’

END OF VOL. II.



